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Siouxland Life

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Opportunities Unlimited (OU) has been serving individuals with special needs in Siouxland since the early 1990's.

Opportunities Unlimited provides Community-Based Neurobehavioral Services and Residential Rehabilitation Services for individuals who have sustained a traumatic brain injury, a spinal cord injury, or other physical disability. The OU campus, which is located on the north side of Sioux City, consists of nine residential homes and a large Community Center that serves as the hub for therapies and activities as well as houses the administrative offices.

In addition to providing Community-Based Neurobehavioral Services and Residential Rehabilitation Services, OU also provides Home and Community Based Services (HCBS) to children and adults with special needs. Individuals eligible for waiver programs can access services for a predetermined number of hours each month, set by the individual's caseworker. These services are offered at the Opportunities Unlimited Community Center, out in the community, and in the

privacy of the person served's home. OU also has two HCBS homes for individuals requiring assistance with skills needed to live in a more independent setting.

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For more information on programs and services available through Opportunities Unlimited, go to www.opportunitiesunlimited.com



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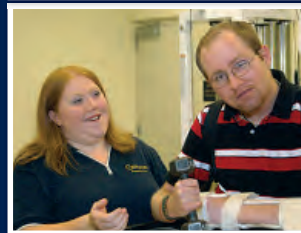
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- Local Non-Profit organization founded in the 1990's by families who had children with brain injuries
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- OU Core Values that inspire our staff and support persons served:
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Siouxland Life

When cold and flu season moves in, attention turns to health. Should I exercise more? Do I need to eat better? Should I get that surgery I've been putting off? In this quarter's Siouxland Life, we look at those areas that can improve your health and well-being. Ever try a singing bowl? It could provide the calm you've been seeking. What about cataracts? Have you had difficulty reading traffic signs? We've got lots of questions and people with answers. Dig in and you'll learn what it might take to bring about a new you!



26

ON THE COVER

Debbie Bernstein LaCroix has been hosting "sound baths" at the center where she plays bowls, gongs and other instruments for groups of people to create a sense of calmness and relaxation. Photograph by *Tim Hynds*

4	HOME space for everything	26	SEEKING CALM singing bowls
10	GET FIT soccer rules	28	HEALTH sensory rooms
14	HEALTH reaching out	30	HEALTH seeing better
17	GET FIT a life with flex	34	HEALTH robotic changes
20	HEALTH nursing booms	39	PARTING SHOT about those cards
24	GET FIT nutrition counts		

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10 SOCCER RULES

Carlos Saenz has always had a hand in the soccer world. Now, he's sharing what he learned playing against Lionel Messi with others.



30 THE EYES MAY HAVE IT

If you can't see as well as you could even a year ago, you could have cataracts. Options abound. And it could just be what you need.



34 ROBOTICS RULE

Surgeons have found new ways to reduce recovery time for their patients. Robotic options have made it possible. Learn about the past, present and future of the business.



This Cherry Hills Lane home is for sale in Dakota Dunes, S.D.

A WARM WELCOME HOME

*Dakota Dunes house has all
the elements to pull you in*

Text by *Dolly A. Butz* | Photographs by *Jesse Brothers*

Granite or quartz countertops, floor to ceiling windows, and an open concept layout with ample space for entertaining are on the must-have lists of buyers seeking high-end homes in Siouxland, according to Suzanne Davis, a licensed real estate agent with Keller Williams Siouxland.

One of Davis' current listings, a six-bedroom, five-bathroom custom-built home on Cherry Hills Lane in Dakota Dunes, checks all of those boxes and more.

When Davis walks through the front door into the foyer, she is struck by the warmth that the two-story home, which was built in 2005, exudes.

"You walk in and you have this homey feeling, which is important to pretty much all of us, no matter what price point," Davis said of the

more than 6,300-square-foot home.

Light pours through large windows that cover the west wall of the living area and look out onto the 11th hole of the Dakota Dunes Country Club and the creek. The bright and airy space features 19-foot ceilings and a gas fireplace. The fireplace, which has a cherry wood mantle, serves as the room's focal point. The wood extends upward toward the ceiling.

Cherry wood carries throughout the home in the kitchen and bathroom cabinetry. Even the banister that leads to four upstairs bedrooms is fashioned of cherry wood.

"You can see that there was caretaking in the planning of the stairway. No matter where you are, you can still get the warm feeling of the fireplace," Davis said.





Above: An upstairs balcony overlooks the living area and kitchen on the main floor at this Cherry Hills Lane home in Dakota Dunes.

Left: An office area is located behind the kitchen with windows overlooking the back deck.

Far left: A staircase leads to the upstairs bedrooms from the front entryway between the living room and dining area at this Cherry Hills Lane home in Dakota Dunes.





An open kitchen is centrally located on the main floor.



Coat closets are located behind the kitchen just inside from the garage.

ENTERTAINER'S DREAM

The spacious living room is open to the kitchen, as well as an eating area. The home also features a separate formal dining room off the foyer.

The kitchen has a raised bar and island, which provides ample seating and prep space. The countertops are dark granite. Other highlights of the space include a six-burner gas stove, pendant lighting and a built-in oven and convection oven, which are flanked by stone that matches the fireplace.

“There’s just so much seating space



The basement features a bar with kitchen area and living area.

around the counter area. You can easily fit eight to 10 people around here,” Davis said. “Especially with a big island like that, that’s lots of prep space for holidays and family get-togethers. I think it was nicely done facing the fireplace, just to welcome everybody to want to sit and visit while things are

being made.”

The lower level has even more entertaining space with another full kitchen and eating area. In fact, Davis said the downstairs functions as its own living quarters, with a bedroom, full bathroom with walk-in shower and living room, which opens to the kitchen.



The basement kitchen area is complete with a bar, oven, microwave and drink cooler.

Pull up a chair in the kitchen to a U-shaped granite breakfast bar. Look up, and you'll see a touch of warmth in the wood that lines the tray ceiling. The downstairs kitchen also has tons of storage, as well as a built-in oven, dishwasher and glass refrigeration space.

Davis said the waterfall-style glass doors on the upper cabinetry behind the bar adds "a little bit of extra shimmer

and elegance."

Watch TV in an adjacent family room space or bust a move on the dance floor, which has its own laser lights and mirrors. Davis said the owners' daughters were in dance class and used the area to practice.

"This is a fun area. They have disco lights and music," she said. "You could easily make this into a workout room."



The basement features a dance studio complete with mirrors and laser lights.



The basement bathroom features a bowl-style sink and shower stall around the corner.



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The spacious master bedroom is located on the main floor.



The master bathroom features separate vanities.

HOMEOWNER'S SUITE

Davis said the homeowner's suite is one of her favorite rooms in the house.

"It has a lot of natural light, which I love," she said.

The bedroom is so big that it makes a king size bed look smaller than it actually

is. A coffered ceiling above the bed adds an additional touch of elegance.

Down a hallway, just off the bedroom, you'll find his and her walk-in closets and a spacious bathroom with separate vanities and a walk-in shower.



A reading nook can be found between upstairs bedrooms.

UPSTAIRS RETREAT

Climb the staircase on the main level to a balcony that overlooks the living room.

"I would have this with a chaise lounge and a little lamp for a reading nook," Davis said of the area, which is currently set up as an office or study space.

The upstairs also features a number of built-ins for storage, which is something

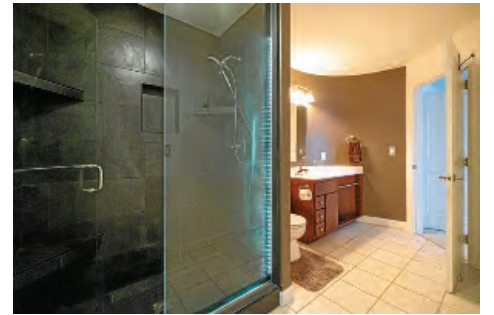


An upstairs loft-style bedroom is shown at this Cherry Hills Lane home in Dakota Dunes.

Davis said you usually only find in old homes.

One of the four upstairs bedrooms could serve as another family room or a play area for children. The spacious bedroom with big windows connects to one of the other bedrooms through a shared bathroom. The bathroom has a black slate walk-in shower with unique blue lighting.

"I love this room up here. This is awesome," Davis said of the bedroom. "There's lots of space."



Left: An upstairs bedroom. Right: The upstairs shower features recessed lighting behind the glass.

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Soccer coach Carlos Saenz demonstrates an agility move during a soccer fitness training session.

SETTING GOALS, MAKING GOALS

High performance fitness camp gives young athletes confidence, on and of the soccer field

Text by Earl Horlyk | Photographs by Jesse Brothers

For Carlos Saenz, the winning combination is 4-3-3.

In soccer, a 4-3-3 formation is a tactic that uses four defenders — made up of two centerbacks and two fullbacks — behind a midline of three.

The 4-3-3 formation is a popular strategy because it is more attack-oriented than other strategies. It's also tricky since all of the players must possess excellent skills.

This is why Saenz was instructing a class of young soccer players, ages 8–18, on the intricacies of the 4-3-3 formation, inside a gym at the Boys and Girls Club of Sioux City.

“The 4-3-3 requires agility, power, strength and endurance,” he explained. “It is a style of play that is used around the world and knowing it will serve you well on a soccer field.”

Saenz certainly knows a lot about soccer. He's been playing the sport most of his life.

A native of Lima, Peru, Saenz attended a soccer academy from ages 7 to 16. This allowed him to play semi-pro soccer, traveling to Spain, Chile and Mexico before moving to the United States at age 17.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 13



David Ochoa dribbles the ball during a soccer fitness training session taught by coach Carlos Saenz at the Boys and Girls Clubs of Siouxland.

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CONTINUED FROM PAGE 10

Since then, Saenz earned a bachelor's degree in exercise science from Mount Marty University, in Yankton, S.D., and a master's degree in health care management from Sioux City's Briar Cliff University.

When he isn't working as an assistant soccer coach for Morningside University's men's soccer team, Saenz is the coach and owner of URU High Performance, a fitness camp that combines physical conditioning and technical drills as a way to improve a young soccer player's individual skills.

In layman's terms, think of URU as an interval training class, designed specifically for soccer kids.

While students learn about important soccer strategies like the 4-3-3 formation, they also participate in a series of drills, between 2 to 5 minutes in duration.

The drills can be anything from quick sprints, calisthenics and, even, maneuvering a soccer ball through a tight obstacle course.

"At most soccer camps, a participant may handle a ball once or twice per session," Saenz said. "At URU, every participant gets plenty of experience with a soccer ball."

In fact, that's how Saenz learned to

SOCCER STRATEGIES FROM A VETERAN COACH

WHAT: URU High Performance, combining high intensity conditioning and technical drills for students soccer athletes

PHONE: 402-508-0568

ONLINE: [instagram.com/uruhighperformance/](https://www.instagram.com/uruhighperformance/)

play the sport. It was also how he trained the Siouxland Diablos, a team of teenage soccer players in Sioux City and South Sioux City.

The Diablos participated in tournaments in the Midwest as well as at the Gothia Cup Soccer Tournament in Gothenburg, Sweden.

Saenz said soccer as a sport in America is seeing an increase in popularity.

"In other parts of the world, soccer is, by far, the most dominant sport to play and watch," he explained. "But there are definitely more American soccer players nowadays."

And many of them are participating in high performance soccer camps like Saenz's.

During each class, participants will learn the basics of the game while getting a intense workout.

"A soccer match should have plenty of



Morningside University assistant soccer coach Carlos Saenz said traveling the world as a semi-pro soccer player gave him confidence, both in and out of the sports world.


action," Saenz said. "A player should be in shape."

The youngest of URU's participants may want to learn the fundamentals. Saenz is also training some of Siouxland's most gifted high school soccer athletes.

"We offer something for all level of soccer players," he said.

Even if URU High Performance students never become the next Lionel Messi in the making, Saenz is certain they'll benefit from his instruction.


"It can give you confidence, both on or off of the soccer field," Saenz said.



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Sarah Sorensen, a registered pharmacist at Drilling Pharmacy, displays a binder of information that is given to patients who participate in the Cardiovascular Practice Transformation Program. The program encourages patients with chronic health conditions, such as high blood pressure, to track their progress with the pharmacy. Drilling is one of 26 pharmacies in the state participating in the University of Iowa program.

DRILLING PHARMACY WORKS CLOSELY WITH PATIENTS TO MONITOR BLOOD PRESSURE

Text by Dolly A. Butz | Photographs by Tim Hynds

Drilling Pharmacy is more closely monitoring diseases linked to heart attack and stroke.

The family owned pharmacy in Morningside is currently one of 26 pharmacies participating in the Cardiovascular Practice Transformation Program, which aims to change workflow practices and improve patient health.

“The CPT program focuses on diabetes, cholesterol and high blood pressure and just helping people identify the numbers, what’s working and what’s not working,” said Sarah Sorensen, a pharmacist at Drilling Pharmacy. Sorensen said the information is passed on to the patient’s doctor of choice.

The program is made possible by

a partnership between the University of Iowa College of Pharmacy and Community Pharmacy Enhanced Services Network Iowa (CPESN), as well as a grant from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, which is overseen by the Iowa Department of Public Health.

Drilling Pharmacy is a part of CPESN, a network of community pharmacies

working together to make patients' lives better. Drilling previously participated in and graduated from Flip the Pharmacy, which is a CPESN USA practice transformation project that seeks to "flip" community-based pharmacies processes and business models away from point-in-time, prescription-level care to longitudinal and patient-level care.

"It's kind of like an appointment-based model. So, we'll try and line up people's meds to be filled at the same time every month. And, then, I can know, 'You're coming in on the first of the month and you have high blood pressure. What's your blood pressure number? It's the same thing with diabetes and immunizations — finding people easier with the appointments,'" Sorensen said.

Patients in the CPT program are loaned a blood pressure monitor for 12 weeks. They also receive an informational booklet, which they use to log their blood pressure readings. Sorensen said Drilling's pharmacists talk to patients about what their blood pressure goal is when they receive their monitor. The pharmacists also show patients how to properly take their blood pressure and explain how the patients' blood pressure medications are working and what those medications do for their bodies.

"For those 12 weeks, all you have to do is take your blood pressure," Sorensen said. "You turn in your readings like once a month, every week, just kind of, say, when you're in the neighborhood. If it's been like six weeks, we'll give you a call. And, then, we'll fax all those readings to the doctor."

Sorensen said she follows up with patients, asking things like, "Did you talk to your doctor about changing your blood pressure medication?" or "I did send those (readings) to your doctor, did they follow up with you?"

At the end of the 12 weeks, Sorensen said most patients want to keep the meter and keep on taking their blood pressure. She said they have the option to buy the meter.

"I think it just helps fill in the gap from that one doctor's appointment to the next doctor's appointment. It just kind of gives a little more data," Sorensen explained.

According to Sorensen, you don't have to be a patient of Drilling's to participate in the program through the pharmacy. She said some people have come to the pharmacy for an immunization and, while waiting for that vaccination, picked up a blood pressure meter that was setting out on a table and inquired about it.

"It's a little bit harder, obviously, to



Sarah Sorensen, a pharmacist at Drilling Pharmacy, holds a binder of information that is given to patients while she talks about the pharmacy's participation in the Cardiovascular Practice Transformation Program during an interview at the Sioux City pharmacy. The program encourages patients with chronic health condition such as high blood pressure to track their progress with Drilling's pharmacists, who can then work with them and their primary care provider to improve their treatment. Drilling is one of 26 pharmacies in the state participating in the University of Iowa program.

“The CPT program focuses on diabetes, cholesterol and high blood pressure and just helping people identify the numbers, what’s working and what’s not working.”

SARAH SORENSEN,
pharmacist at Drilling Pharmacy

track the meds. I'm really on the patient to be more forthcoming and stuff. But, we have people on the blood pressure program who aren't patients here," she said. "They'll say, 'That's a really cool blood pressure meter.' And, then, it'll just kind of like snowballs from there. And, now, they're in the program."

Sorensen said it's "eye opening" for

some people to learn what can happen if their blood pressure isn't managed. Many people with high blood pressure don't have any warning signs or symptoms.

"Stroke, heart failure, heart attack — you could end up in the hospital," Sorensen said of the consequences of high blood pressure.

Restricting sodium, exercising, losing weight, limiting alcohol and adhering to the DASH eating plan are lifestyle changes that can lower blood pressure and keep it down. DASH promotes eating vegetables, fruits and whole grains, as well as including fat-free or low-fat dairy products, fish, poultry, beans, nuts and vegetable oils. Foods that are high in saturated fat, such as fatty meats and full-fat dairy products, are to be limited, as well as sugar-sweetened beverages and sweets.

Even if you don't have a family history of high blood pressure and are otherwise healthy, Sorensen said it's a good idea to get your blood pressure checked every now and then.

"There's so many people just out there walking around and they don't know. How many people don't have a primary care provider? They're not getting a check," she said.

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Rod Ketchens, 56, a fitness trainer and owner of RK Solid, is shown working out on a triceps press machine at Four Seasons Health Club. Ketchens said that resistance training can help improve strength and balance in older people, which could help prevent falls.

IRON MAN

A former professional weightlifter on the benefits of pumping as people age

Text by Earl Horlyk | Photographs by Tim Hynds

Rod Ketchens knows his way around a photo shoot.

If he needs to pick up a dumbbell, Ketchens will choose one which is lighter than the weight he'd usually lift.

"You never know how many pictures a photographer will need or how long a shoot will take," Ketchens, who has been featured in such magazines as "Flex," "Iron Man" and "Muscle and Fitness," explains. "You don't want to look like you're straining."

Removing his shirt before the start of a bench press regimen, Ketchens looks like the former Morningside College football player he was back in the day.

Ketchens also retained the physique he had when he won numerous bodybuilding competitions, including Mr. Iowa (three times), Mr. America and Mr. USA, before capping off an amateur career to become an International Federation of Bodybuilding and Fitness professional bodybuilder.

"I started lifting weight when I was 11 years old," he says. "I did it as a way to stay out of trouble. Instead, it completely changed my life for the better."

Looking at the bank of weights station located at Four Seasons Health Club, Ketchens reflects for a moment.

"Did I ever think I'd still be lifting weights at my age?" he says, chuckling at the thought. "When I was young, I couldn't even picture what a 56-year-old weightlifter would look like."



A former three-time Mr. Iowa, Rod Ketchens, 56, said people can continue to lift weights as long as they want to.

“So here I am,” Ketchens adds. “I may not be in competition shape right now, but I look good while walking down the street.”

In Ketchens’ case, staying in shape makes business sense.

As owner of RK Solid and an International Fitness Professional Association-certified personal trainer, he divides his time between three of Four Seasons Health Club’s four locations.

“My clients can range in age anywhere from age 5 to age 80, with everyone in between,” Ketchens says.

Do his clients know that they’re training with a former professional bodybuilder?

“Some of them probably do,” Ketchens admits. “Hopefully, they all know that I take working out very seriously. Nobody wants an out-of-shape personal trainer.”

A self-admitted “gym rat,” he alternates between weight training days and cardio days as a way to keep lively.

Yet Ketchens says he no longer trains to build big, bulky muscles. He is into muscle maintenance.

“I do a lot of resistance training because it helps me to improve strength and balance, which become an issue as we get older,” he says.

Adding a healthy amount of cardio on top of that helps to keep your heart pumping. Both weight training and cardio can prevent falls for an aging population.

FIT FOR LIFE

WHAT: Rod Ketchens’ RK SOLID, with accredited coaches who will provide one-on-one or group training for people of all ages and fitness levels

WHERE: Four Seasons Health Club, 1600 Seventh St., Sioux City

PHONE: 712-898-6560

Outside of that, Ketchens says fitness training can also provide a mental boost.

“I feel more alert when I’m working out,” he says. “I feel like I’m running on all cylinders.”

Combining weight training, cardio and a nutritious diet has been a form of preventive medicine for Ketchens.

“I have aches and pains like everyone else,” he says. “I definitely think an active lifestyle will always be a plus.”

Another incentive is being around people who may be younger than you.

“I’m still pretty competitive,” Ketchens says. “It may be harder to catch up at times but I’ll always do my best.”

That’s a good thing since Ketchens won’t be giving up weight training anytime soon.

“There’s no age limitation to bodybuilding,” he said. “I intend on doing it for as long as I can.”



Rod Ketchens, 56, a fitness trainer and owner of RK Solid, said that resistance training can help improve strength and balance in older people, which could help prevent falls.

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B. WILDE SERVICES



Samuel Wycoff, left, and Kennedy Anderson, both seniors in Briar Cliff University's nursing program, are shown in a clinical classroom Tuesday, Jan. 17, 2023, at the School City school. Job opportunities are abundant across the spectrum of nursing.

NURSING OPPORTUNITIES ABUNDANT FOR NEW GRADS

Text by *Caitlin Yamada* | Photographs by *Tim Hynds*

Throughout the nation, the number of students enrolling and graduating from nursing programs does not meet the healthcare shortage.

This is creating a unique opportunity for graduating nursing students by allowing them to pick the jobs where their passion lies.

Briar Cliff University and St. Luke's College in Sioux City are both seeing how the nursing shortage is impacting students.

"Today's nurses are in high demand and have lots of options," said St. Luke's College President Kendra Ericson. She said it is a great field to enter because of it.

Courtney Ott, assistant professor of nursing at Briar Cliff, said for students who want to go to college and know they will enter right into a profession after graduation, nursing is the road to take.

“I tell my students never to stress about having a job because they need [nurses] everywhere.”

COURTNEY OTT,
assistant professor of nursing
at Briar Cliff University

“I tell my students never to stress about having a job because they need [nurses] everywhere,” Ott said.

Samuel Wycoff and Kennedy Anderson are seniors in Briar Cliff’s nursing program. In most careers, the job search starts in the latter half of the last year of college. Wycoff said in nursing, healthcare professionals are scouting out students during clinical visits.

“I’ve been to a few clinical sites ... where they’re like ‘if you want a job, you should come here, this is what we’re offering,’” he said.

Both said there are many opportunities out there and students don’t have to look



Samuel Wycoff, left, and Kennedy Anderson, both seniors in Briar Cliff University’s nursing program, talk about their post-graduation job prospects during an interview Tuesday, Jan. 17, 2023, at the School City school. Courtney Ott, center, assistant professor of nursing, said job opportunities are abundant across the spectrum of nursing.

very far for what they are interested in.

Wycoff and Anderson have not chosen jobs yet, but both know they want to work in the emergency room setting. Wycoff is also interested in the intensive care unit.

Anderson is from the Des Moines area and plans to return for employment. She said she wants to start somewhere with a lower acuity where she can improve, instead of being “thrown into the deep

end.” Wycoff is from out of state and wants to continue to higher education, but is unsure where.

The pair said everyone in their class knows what specific area of nursing they want to go into.

In the past, recently graduated nurses would start at the general surgical floor or other generalized units and work their way up.

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Ericson, a nurse for more than 25 years, said now graduating students can start in specialty units like intensive care, labor and delivery, or the emergency room.

“We have students who have taken positions at Mayo [Clinic] and 25 years ago they wouldn’t have been able to do that,” she said.

Another change Ericson has noticed is in the past, most nursing graduates would have to start in the clinic setting and would be able to move to home care or independent practices after a certain number of years. Now, students can do that right away.

Ericson said nursing students know there are lots of options for jobs and that they are in high demand. She said this allows them to choose where they want to work based on a variety of factors including fair wages, culture and team compatibility.

The students are looking at how the team functions together, what the turnover and shortage rates are, what employment options the hospital is offering, and what support is being given.

If a hospital doesn’t have the job options the student is looking for, the student will turn the offer down and go somewhere else, Ericson said.

Ott said last year all of the Briar Cliff nursing students graduated with a job.

Ericson said 75 to 80% of St. Luke’s College graduates have a job lined up. The remaining students don’t have a job by choice. Some want time to study for the national nursing exam, while others want a year to relax before entering the workforce, she said.

Around 50 to 60% of the students graduating from both programs stay in Siouxland. Most often, out-of-state students return to their home states.

The nursing shortage is occurring for a variety of reasons. With a large aging population, the need for nurses is increasing. Coupling that with many nurses retiring or leaving due to stress from the COVID-19 pandemic, the shortage continues to increase.

Ott said it used to be females would go to college and go into either nursing or education, creating a boom in both industries, but now the opportunities are limitless.

Iowa is producing a significant number of nurses, but the areas students are interested in are not the areas where the biggest shortages are occurring, Ericson said. She said if one were to ask a hospital where their openings are, most would say the general surgical floor.

Through 2021, Ericson said there were increases and stability in nursing

education programs. She said there were many students actively choosing to pursue nursing education during the pandemic.

She said like the boom in people entering the emergency fields after 9/11, the pandemic was a call out for students who wanted to do their part and get into the nursing profession to help their community.

Now there is stabilization and a decrease in nursing enrollment throughout the state. Ericson said nurses are feeling the impact of the workforce conditions and it is having an impact on morale. This is trickling down to the students, who may now be more cautious about entering the field.



Samuel Wycoff, left, and Kennedy Anderson, both seniors in Briar Cliff University’s nursing program, are shown in a clinical classroom.



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FENDING OFF DEMENTIA

Brain fitness program offers keys to dementia prevention

Text by *Dolly A. Butz*

Did you know that you can reduce your risk of dementia by up to 70%, just by making some simple lifestyle changes?

The Norm Waitt Sr. YMCA is currently in the midst of offering a second 10-week session of Unlocking Brain Fitness: Keys to Dementia Prevention (KEYS). A third session of the evidence-based course, which was created to help people age 55 and older reduce their risk of developing Alzheimer's and other forms of dementia, is also planned for some time in the spring.

Dawn Welch, a health specialist at the Norm Waitt Sr. YMCA, said anyone 55 and older, who is concerned about dementia, but doesn't already show any cognitive decline, should consider taking the class, which provides information and resources, as well as support.

There are various types of dementia, which is a devastating condition that can wreak havoc on a person's physical, mental, emotional, social and financial well-being.

"It could be someone in their 80s, but they're still doing really well. It could be someone who just turned 55 and wants to make sure that they're doing everything they can lifestyle change-wise to prevent it," Welch said of those who would be prime candidates for the course. "If there's a family history of dementia, it definitely would be a reason to take it."

KEYS was developed by Dr. Patricia Quinlisk, Iowa Epidemiologist Emeritus, in tandem with a medically based program offered by Dr. Yogesh Shah, geriatrician and Chief Medical Officer at Broadlawns Medical Center in Des Moines. The Norm Waitt Sr. YMCA is

able to offer the program to members and non-members for \$20 per person, through a partnership with the YMCA of Greater Des Moines and a grant from the Iowa Department of Public Health.

Welch said the class, which is currently based at the Siouxland Center for Active Generations, is "very hands-on" and requires individuals to set goals and participate fully. While the course does consist of some presentations, Welch said participants perform KEYS-based exercises, engage in group discussions and meet one on one with specialists, including a dietitian, fitness professional and pharmacist specializing in geriatrics.

"The cool thing about this is they get the group interaction. The social piece is a big part of it," Welch said. "As we get older, we can have cognitive decline if we don't have that social time, too."

Each week, the course covers a different prevention KEY. All of the KEYS are interconnected. Eat well is one of those key areas. The KEYS program recommends the MIND diet, which is a combination of the Mediterranean diet and the DASH diet for hypertension.

"It focuses a lot on eating leafy greens, lots of fruits and vegetables, very little meat and lots of fish," Welch explained. "Those are known to be helpful for brain health. The MIND diet is a really good resource for people."

Get moving is another KEY. The more active a person is, the more blood flow they will have to their brain. Welch said this helps prevent cognitive decline.

"Also, you get those endorphins — the dopamine, the serotonin. That's also going to also help you stay sharp,"

said Welch, who noted that one of the program's sessions is held at the YMCA. Participants sign up to meet for half an hour with a personal trainer, who shows them around the YMCA's wellness floor and teaches them how to use the exercise equipment.

"Part of the program right now is that they do get access to the Y during the KEYS program. That's a huge perk," she said.

Sleep enough, another KEY, is one of the foundations of health, according to Welch. If a person doesn't get enough sleep, she said they don't think or feel right. She said an individual's immune system is also negatively impacted by a lack of sleep.

"We talk about what we can do for sleep hygiene — make sure the bedroom is only for sleeping, don't drink alcohol or caffeine close to bedtime, don't have the TV on, sleep in a cool room," she said. "Sleep is very important. A lot of people who have cognitive decline aren't getting good quality sleep."

For more information or to register for the KEYS program, visit nwsymca.org/programs/unlocking-brain-fitness or call 402-404-8439.



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Debbie Bernstein LaCroix has been hosting “sound baths” at the center where she plays bowls, gongs and other instruments for groups of people to create a sense of calmness and relaxation.

SUPER BOWLS

Sioux City’s Debbie Bernstein LaCroix’s singing bowl collection aims to keep folks calm

Text by Jared McNett | Photographs by Tim Hynds

It took Debbie Bernstein LaCroix three months to get one to sing.

Over a period of 90 days in 2022, the Expansion Center co-owner would make circles around the outer rims of the metal singing bowls she’d bought as a birthday gift and she wouldn’t hear what she wanted to hear. The sound is a kind of melodious whirl. One which emanates outward, like ripples in a pond a small pebble’s been dropped into.

These days, there’s an audience present when Bernstein LaCroix makes waves with the collection of bowls she has accrued since getting more

comfortable with an instrument whose history can be measured in millennia.

The events Bernstein LaCroix hosts at the Expansion Center, a downtown Sioux City space with wood floors fit for a temple, are called “Sound Baths” and her intent is to immerse people in calming and relaxing vibrations.

“I love how it helps other people,” Bernstein LaCroix said. “When you experience it, some of the people who have come to see me have said they feel like they’re levitating or going on a journey, almost like a lucid dream.”

When the Expansion Center opened

at 1119 Fourth St. in November 2021, Bernstein LaCroix said she and co-owner Stacy Anderson brought in a few metal bowls for inventory.

“I’ve read lots of books on it and I’m just fascinated with frequency and vibration. Because everything is energy. I get kind of nerdy and love the science of things,” Anderson said. Anderson and Bernstein LaCroix bill the Expansion Center as a “holistic center with retail, services and workshops that support mind, body and spirit.”

The set-up Bernstein LaCroix has positioned around a rug on the Expansion



Debbie Bernstein LaCroix sets up a set of sound bowls at the Expansion Center in downtown Sioux City.

Center floor features not just bowls, a majority of which are made of crystal, but gongs, chimes, mallets, tuning forks and shakers. She's even added a 21-inch, 25-pound metal bowl from Kathmandu, Nepal that's possible to stand in. When struck, it emits a deep bassy tone. All in service of helping visitors try and reach a meditative state.

"It's one of those (things) that I never meant to deep dive into but I loved it," Bernstein LaCroix said.

One Sound Bath attendee, Erin Binneboese, said the medley of instruments work to create "earthy sounds."

"The sublime resonance and aromas allow the opening to journey into meditation and experience a therapeutic, healing, and invaluable feeling of inwardness for me," Binneboese wrote.

The usage of singing bowls for the purpose of helping people relax or enter into reflective states is nothing new, according to National Music Museum Education Curator Deborah Reeves.

"In Tibetan Buddhism, musical instruments play a big role in aiding meditation," Reeves said. "They're seen as a tool to set up this deep meditation."

Reeves said singing bowls are most closely associated with Tibet and tend to be made out of non-ferrous metals such as bronze. The instruments actually qualify as resting bells because of the way in which they're played.

"The sound is created because of friction. It's usually some type of baton or stick or mallet that tends to be covered in

leather that you rub around the outside of the rim (the open mouth) and that creates a traveling wave that is carried around the circumference," Reeves said. That sound wave then translates to an audible pitch.

While singing bowls are commonly linked to meditation, they're far from the only instruments used for such purposes. Reeves said there are oboe-like instruments played with circular breathing (breathing in through the nose while simultaneously pushing air out through the mouth), finger cymbals, trumpets, conch shells and a myriad of drums.

"All being used to facilitate meditation," Reeves said.

Though Bernstein LaCroix took percussion, piano, guitar and voice lessons as she was growing up, she never thought of herself as a musician.

"My band instructor, in fifth grade, told my mom I had no hand-eye coordination and probably shouldn't play drums," Bernstein LaCroix said.

Bernstein LaCroix's still taking classes now but the focus has shifted. In 2022, she traveled to Cedar Rapids for a three-day "intensive sound-healing class." The course's instructor, Natalie Brown, teaches orchestra and also runs Sounds Heal Studio which she uses as a space to promote what she refers to as sound healing.

"As a lifelong musician and longtime music educator, music and sound have always been a passion of mine. By journeying into sound and holistic



Debbie Bernstein LaCroix has found "sound baths" create a sense of calmness and relaxation.

healing I have discovered a rich and powerful tool to help others and I hope to share this knowledge, empower individuals and the community," Brown writes on her website.

For Bernstein LaCroix, the collection of musical tools is only growing. She said she wants to get several "practitioner bowls" which allow for freer motion. Were someone to come for a private meditation session featuring the singing bowls, Bernstein LaCroix would be able to move around them. The reactions she gets in the sessions, private or public, are part of what she said has kept her investing so much time, energy and money.

"I wanted the instruments because I thought that they were cool but when you can utilize it for good, that makes it even better."



Siouxland District Health staff Angela Drent and Matthew Robertson in one of the new sensory rooms. The rooms are intended to be a space for patients who could benefit from sensory items such as those on the spectrum.

SEEKING EQUALITY

New district health sensory rooms one step in increasing equity for patients

Text and Photograph by Caitlin Yamada

The Siouxland District Health Department is trying to increase healthcare accessibility for patients with a variety of disabilities.

By adding a wheelchair weight scale, sensory-friendly rooms, grab bars, transfer boards, and Pocketalker hearing amplifiers and magnifiers, the district health department is increasing access for patients with disabilities.

Angela Drent, a health planner at Siouxland District Health Department, said their goal was to make changes that would help patients with disabilities and could be implemented by other clinics.

One of the major changes district health made was adding sensory-friendly rooms. Drent said she spoke with the nurses and other staffers throughout the

building, and having more equipment and tools to help individuals with sensory issues was a suggestion.

“Getting an immunization is not extremely fun for most individuals, let alone kids, so having some [sensory] items in rooms helps provide a better experience for not only individuals with disabilities but any of our families that come in,” Drent said.

The items are intended to provide comfort and distraction. Many are inexpensive and are visual, tactile or vestibular (certain balance boards or swings would qualify). There are weighted objects, stress balls, stuffed animals, light-up items and more.

The rooms now have dimmer switches to help calm individuals down

and two rooms have fabrics covering the fluorescent bulbs to dissipate the light.

“They’re changes that make a difference to people who need them,” said Siouxland District Health’s Matthew Robertson.

The district health department was one of two local public health agencies in the nation selected for the Strengthening Disability Inclusion Effort within Local Health Departments grant. The grant was aimed at helping people with disabilities by implementing new policies, systems, or environmental changes to reduce barriers, increase accessibility or provide inclusive recreation opportunities.

Robertson said the changes have been well received by both people who have sensory issues and those who don’t. He said it changes the clinic environment to be a little more friendly and comforting.

Siouxland District Health also purchased a tent which provides an enclosed, comforting space for those who may need it, and can be moved to any room or space in the area.

The changes are not just physical items. Drent said district health has been working to put in place different processes, policies and training to increase awareness and accessibility.

The department has started propping open the door to the laboratory area during business hours to allow for easy entry. They have also updated their contract for interpretation services and created a process so other departments can request services.

One idea Drent and Robertson have is to make it so those who have sensory issues do not have to wait in the waiting room and instead, are taken directly to their immunization room.

Clients and families can provide information on disabilities before their appointments so district health can be better prepared. If someone wants or needs the sensory-friendly rooms, they can request it before their appointment.

Another large change district health made with the grant was purchasing a wheelchair weight scale, something many clinics do not have.

Robertson said they had a client in a wheelchair that had not been weighed in years and had no idea how much she weighed.

District health also purchased an exam table that raises and lowers to make it easier for those in wheelchairs to get on the exam table.

“Everybody deserves to have a good quality appointment, or the same types of services everybody else is getting,” Drent said.

Drent hopes to help other clinics and businesses in the area implement these types of changes. She said the Sioux City ambulance crew has expressed interest in getting handheld items for the trucks.

"Anything we can do to impact or get other businesses to think about inclusion and accessibility is a win in our book," she said.

Siouxland District Health, with Siouxland Interstate Metropolitan Planning Organization (SIMPCO), completed on-site community health inclusion index assessments at district health, the Warming Shelter and Plaza Bowl, according to a news release.

Each business was then provided a report with recommendations for inclusive policy, system or environmental changes they could make to improve accessibility.

The Warming Shelter installed an ADA front load washing machine, a wheelchair charging station and a ramp at the emergency exit for mobility devices.

Plaza Bowl purchased ramps, bowling ball pushers and a retractable handle bowling ball. They are also working on a bathroom renovation to improve accessibility.



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SIouxLAND LIFE

WINTER 2023

29



Dr. Justin Kuiper, an ophthalmologist at Bruening Eye Specialists, holds a teaching model of an eye at the practice's Dakota Dunes, South Dakota offices.

'GET THAT CLOUDY LENS OUT'

Cataract surgery is quick, safe and can improve vision in more ways than one

Text by *Mason Dockter*
Photographs by *Tim Hynds*

There aren't all that many 10- or 15-minute outpatient procedures that completely and permanently correct a medical condition. Rarer still is the quick procedure that vanquishes more than one problem, all in one fell swoop.

Cataract surgery is one such procedure.

Cataracts are a sort of a cloudiness that develops in the natural lens of the eye. The lens starts out clear at birth; clouding becomes increasingly prevalent once the lenses have seen seven or eight decades of daily use.

“Most people, by the time they get to their 60s or 70s, have at least some cataract development,” said Dr. Justin Kuiper, an ophthalmologist with Bruening Eye Specialists.

“It is just kind of a normal degradation of the quality of the clear lens. It essentially goes from this kind of clear, to a yellowish or a brownish color, which blocks the light coming into the eye and affects the clarity of the vision,” Kuiper said.

Cataracts can also develop in conjunction with certain health conditions or as a result of certain medicines, like steroid medications. “So there’s some certain situations where you might get it at a younger age,” Kuiper said.

PETS GET THEM, TOO

The condition can also affect animals other than humans — cataracts in older dogs are often plainly visible to the naked eye. In a dog blinded by cataracts, the eyes typically have a clouded and opaque appearance, at times almost whitish-gray, due to light hitting the eye and being reflected right back out. That reflected light, in a healthy eye, would have gone into the retina to be processed as clear eyesight. But if that light is visible to an observer, the dog can probably see very little.

It’s quite similar to what happens in human eyes. But elderly dogs don’t need their eyes to read, drive or watch television, and they usually don’t live in blindness for another 20 or 30 years after cataracts develop.

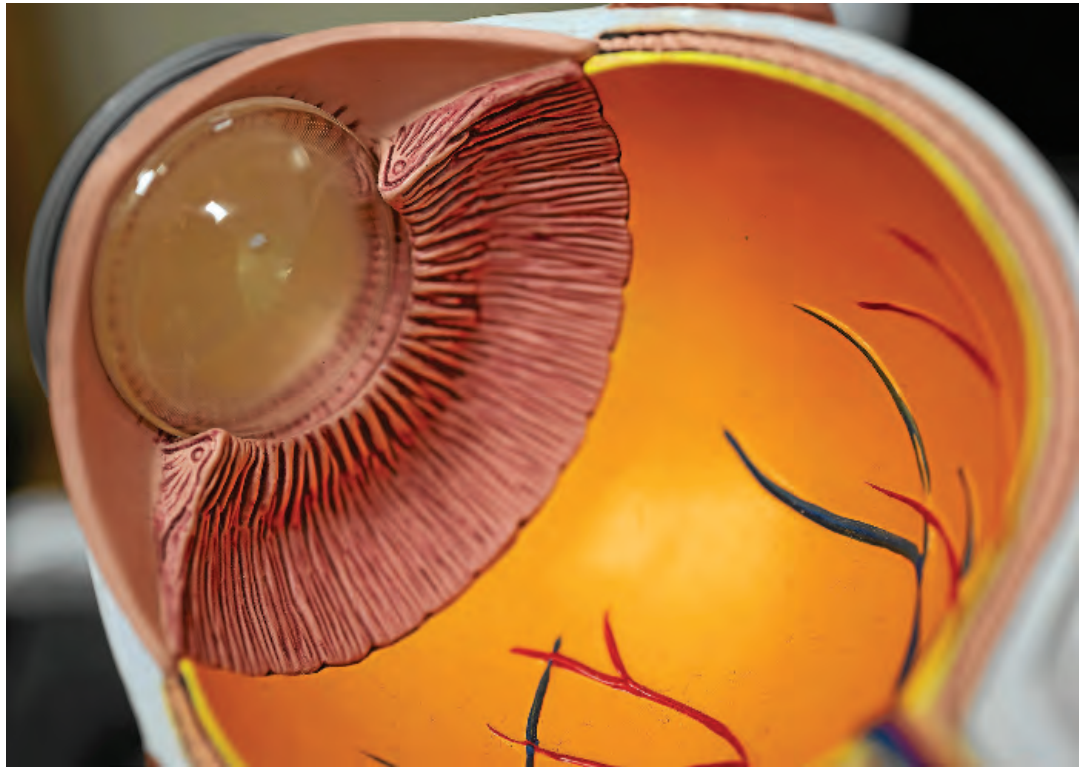
“It starts to affect vision, causing nighttime glare from car headlights or difficulty with reading in dim light,” Kuiper said. “And as it progresses, it blocks more of the light entering the eye, and can cause, ultimately, pretty profound vision loss. Unless it’s treated.”

SURGERY’S THE WAY

There are only two treatment paths for cataract patients: surgery or nothing. There aren’t any solutions that don’t involve a knife. “At this point, there’s really no other treatment for cataracts,” Kuiper said.

Cataract surgery — which was attempted in ancient times, to unknowable degrees of success — has made major progress during the last century.

“The big advancement was, they used to take the cataract, or the lens of the eye, out in one piece, which required a pretty big incision and was kind of a long recovery. Now it’s more like laparoscopic surgery, sort of, where we have these very small incisions, small enough they don’t



A teaching model of an eye is shown with a insert representing the cloudy lens of a cataract.



A teaching model of an eye is shown.

require any stitches actually, and we can remove the cataract in pieces. So it’s all done through these two small incisions. And that’s how we’ve been doing cataract surgery for several years now.”

The failing lens is swapped with a synthetic acrylic or silicone replacement, which Kuiper said are inert, durable and inevitably “outlive the patient.” Lens technology has progressed to the point

where the new lens is not only perfectly clear, but in some cases functions better than the old lens did when it was new.

“We’re doing more of what we call ‘refractive cataract surgery,’ where the goal is not just, get that cloudy lens out, get a clear lens in, it’s — let’s do that, plus try to correct any refractive error that you have,” Kuiper said. “So patients are seeing really well, without glasses.”



Dr. Justin Kuiper, an ophthalmologist at Bruening Eye Specialists, sits behind a slit lamp, a microscope that can be used to check eyes for cataracts.

LIKE LASIK

The end result is similar to LASIK eye surgery, but unlike LASIK, cataract surgery kills two birds with one stone.

“People get LASIK to get out of glasses when they’re younger, but when you’re older, for some patients it’s actually better to do what’s called a clear lens exchange, which is basically cataract surgery on somebody that doesn’t yet have a visually significant cataract,” Kuiper said. “Because of these lenses that we have now, we can correct your vision for distance, we can correct it for computer distance, we can correct it up close. So they make lenses that are called ‘trifocal lenses.’ They basically do everything your glasses do, but it’s inside your eye.”

Cataract surgery is usually a 10- or 15-minute outpatient procedure done “with minimal sedation,” Kuiper said.

A topical anesthetic and some lidocaine inside the eye is about all the anesthetic that’s needed; the eye, as organs go, is relatively insensitive to pain. “The only part of the eye that really has much sensation actually is the

cornea, which is the clear front part of the eye. And if you put some numbing eye drops in the cornea, people do great with surgery,” he said. “Most patients sail through surgery without any discomfort.”

But that reality is at odds with a natural anxiety that results from having a sharp object so very close to the eye. Talking with the patients during the procedure can keep them at ease. A mild sedative can also be employed. “Pretty much across the board, once people get done with surgery, they’ll say, ‘I’m not sure what I was so nervous about. It was no big deal,’” Kuiper said.

“Patients are awake. Sometimes we give them medicine to keep them comfortable, or almost in like the twilight state, just to get them through the procedure,” he said.

Afterward, patients may experience “a little bit of discomfort, mild irritation,” Kuiper said. “But that’s about it.”

Complications are relatively uncommon, with a 1 to 2% chance of inflammation or swelling, or high eye pressure, all of which can be treated with

eye drops. Serious issues like infection or retinal detachment are quite rare, Kuiper said, and those issues are generally treatable.

“And usually the vision’s pretty good shortly after surgery. So people notice the improvement pretty quickly,” he said.

COMMONLY PERFORMED

Tens of millions of satisfied patients can’t be wrong — cataract surgery is easily among the most commonly performed surgeries in the United States, with ophthalmologists like Kuiper performing the procedure several million times each year.

The typical end result is a marked quality-of-life improvement for the patient.

“Not only improving the vision because the cataract’s out of there, but just reducing that dependence on glasses, particularly for people that are really nearsighted or really farsighted, I mean they need glasses for everything,” Kuiper said. “Those are some of the happiest patients after cataract surgery.”

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Dr. Lawrence Volz is shown in an operating room where he uses a robotic machine to perform surgery at MercyOne Siouxland Medical Center.

A ROBOTIC WORLD

The past, present and future of robotics in surgery in Siouxland

Text by Jared McNett | Photographs by Jesse Brothers

Around the start of the previous decade, Dr. Lawrence Volz said he was one of the first surgeons in Siouxland to start doing certain operations with robotics at MercyOne Medical Center. But it didn't feel entirely seamless to him.

"(The) first generation robot was really sort of poor quality," Volz said. "It was totally different. We just started doing simple stuff, like gallbladders, and it really didn't make

sense to me. So I did it for a little while and then was like: "This isn't worth the time and expense for a gallbladder."

Dr. James Hegvik, a general surgeon of three-and-a-half years who practices at MercyOne in Sioux City and Dunes Surgical Hospital in Dakota Dunes, first became aware of the viability of robotics in surgery while he was in his second and third years of residency. Mostly from afar though. And

not at a rapid clip.

"A lot of staff were learning it at the time so we didn't do a lot of it during residency other than watching it," he said. "I think anybody in the hospital would tell you: When they first had the surgeons come in, they were painful because they were slow."

Now though, things aren't so slow and noticeable. Certain robotics surgeries, say a colon removal, are smooth enough a patient can be sent home with Tylenol rather than narcotics, according to Volz.

And the possibilities for usage have grown, substantially.

Robotics aren't just for gallbladders. Hegvik said it's possible to work throughout the entire abdomen. There are ways of injecting dyes, meant to find good blood supply, that can be done with robotics.

"The tech gets better all the time," Volz said.

We chatted with him and Hegvik about where robotics in surgery has been as practice, where it is now and where it's headed.

PAST

Hegvik said one of the reasons the initial usage of robotics in surgery moved at a slower pace is because outcomes drive

Dr. James Hegvik talks about the use of robotic machines to perform surgery. Dr. Hegvik's office is located at the CNOS—Sioux Point Clinic in Dakota Dunes, S.D.



everything and surgeons such as himself want patients to do well regardless of the approach used.

“So they were tedious and long but, you know, once you get through some of that learning curve, it’s just as facile (timing wise) as it is laparoscopically (sometimes faster),” he said. (Laparoscopy is a procedure used to check the organs in the abdomen and requires small incisions in the belly, per Johns Hopkins Medicine.)

According to Hegvik, there wasn’t a set amount of training required with the robotics.

“Really, once you’re comfortable doing it,” he said. “You had a couple cases with the proctors and then kind of go to it.”

Volz said while the initial quality of the robots wasn’t out of this world, things changed when subsequent generations came out.

“We started doing more procedures. Then we started doing hernias and bowel resections and pretty much everything in the belly we can do robotically now,” he said.

PRESENT

Nowadays, Volz does about 20% of his surgeries with the use of robotics. For intra-



Dr. James Hegvik shows an image of the robotic machine he uses to perform surgery.

abdominal cases, the number climbs to 50%.

“I’m probably a high-utilizer,” Volz said. “I have some partners who don’t do it at all. But I do. I find a significant value in it.”

He said one of the biggest pluses with current robotics in surgery is wrist motion.

“I can get around cores easier. I control the camera, the camera’s three dimensions, so I can see a lot more accurately in there,” Volz said.

Most often, a surgical robot will have two instruments (one in each hand) and a doctor is able to toggle between them



Dr. Lawrence Volz describes how he operates the robotic device at this console.

from a control station. “A lot of times, if I’m operating, one of them will grab tissue and hold it, and then the other ones will work on cutting it or sewing it, something like that,” said Volz.

In total, Hegvik said about 30% of his practice involves surgery with robotics. He agrees movement and vision are major incentives for robotic usage.

“You can use a wristed instrument inside the abdomen so it really can turn and twist a lot greater,” he said. “(And) the visualization is wonderful. It’s 3D. You get to control all of that. And it allows you to do things, inside the abdomen that, laparoscopically, just weren’t really very doable.”

With that, Hegvik said he feels like the precision he can offer a patient is at a higher level.

FUTURE

Both Hegvik and Volz agree that the future will be one where more and more can be done with robotics in surgery.

“The technology is really good right now. Part of it is us learning how to use the technology better. And how to apply it and become more aggressive with what we’re doing,” Volz said. He then added that there are more robots being



Dr. James Hegvik shows an image taken inside a patient’s body during a surgery performed by a robotic machine.

offered by more companies which will help drive prices down and allow for more practices to get onboard.

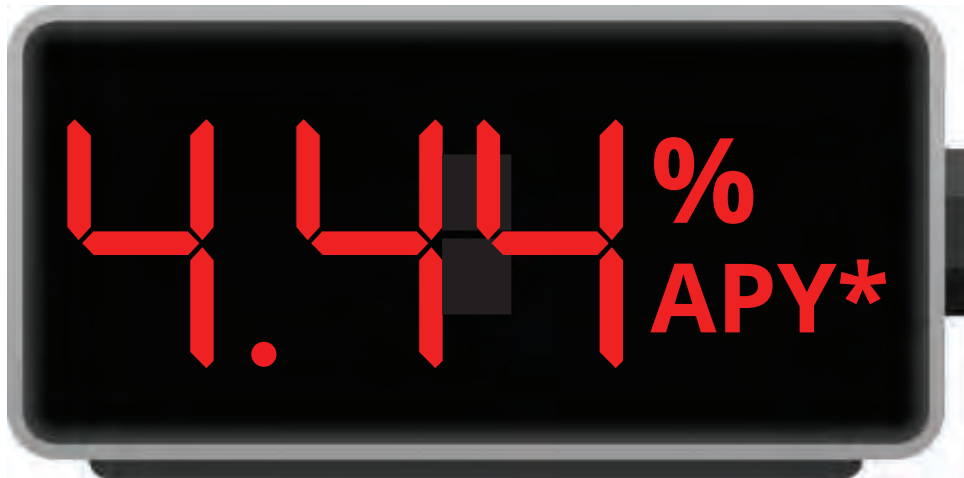
Hegvik sees a total saturation of sorts.

“I think some of the more intricate

acute care surgery, like ruptured colons and things, it’s going to be a 24/7 thing and everybody’s going to know how to use it. I think really, as these residents are coming out of training, they’re going to be even more comfortable with it.”



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CREATE A TRENDY AND TIMELESS HOME IN 2023

If you want to create rooms in your home that are both trendy and timeless, Mod House Interiors can help you decorate so that your décor looks fresh and new. For 2023, the color focus is moving to warm neutrals and earth tones, colorful furniture pieces that aren't normally considered to be neutrals – desaturated blues, greens, and sun-washed terra cotta will become the base to build rooms around.

“These warm colors help a space feel more welcoming and inviting but are a more ‘spicy’ neutral of 2022,” said Lisa Kalaher, owner of Mod House Interiors.

Look to nature to start this color trend; Kalaher

recommends looking for dried flowers and grasses for color inspiration and exploring a fun mix of all the colors and textures.

“You don't have to hold yourself to the constraints of just a couple of colors,” she said. “Pair these ‘spicy’ neutrals with natural stones such as travertine and light natural woods to create a tasteful and TIMELESS home décor trend that will never look dated.”

More trends Kalaher sees gaining strength in 2023 are curved and softened edges, large statement stone with lots of movement, and dark and moody spaces (think all dark walls). For 2023-2024 a move toward bolder

wallpaper, brighter jeweled colors, and bold fabrics mixes will gain strength in home decor. Watch for the word maximalist to becoming the new trend word. The next couple of years will be about making your space truly reflect YOU so have fun with it!

Let Mod House Interiors help you make your home a true reflection of you. Call Lisa for a consultation at 712-224-2555.





ABOUT THAT CHRISTMAS CARD...

Don't worry if you didn't get a Christmas card from me. I didn't send any.

Oh, I had good intentions and then lost track of time. Instead of decorating, I figured the Fourth of July stuff I still had up could be identified as a patriotic holiday theme. So, no tree.

And then, somewhere around the week after Christmas, I started feeling guilty about the card.

Usually, I find a photograph of me with somebody famous and pass it off as a "best buds" kind of thing.

But for the past three years, I've been nowhere, seen no one.

The only photos I have from the last year show me in sweatpants and T-shirts. Heralding "a new sweatshirt!" as the highlight of the year didn't seem quite card-worthy.

So, I combed the possibilities (Bruce and his favorite cat, Bruce and snow, Bruce and tulips, Bruce and his yard before it died from lack of watering) and realized this might be one of those years when I just punted and used stock art.

When I narrowed the field, I realized one with me in snow might help explain why I was so late at getting this done. ("No wonder he didn't get cards out on time. He was busy shoveling snow!" Which is also a lie.)

Then, it was just a matter of creating the card online. I went to one of those "do it today, get it Friday" companies and thought I was home free. I added the photos, thought of a clever tagline and sent it off. Even though I didn't get the "early bird" discount, I figured it was worth paying full price just to get them out before Valentine's Day.

I waited. And waited. And waited. And they didn't arrive.

I went on a business trip and, while gone, got a note – "Your cards are arriving this week!"

The problem? They were going to sit on my doorstep for five days. Five snowy days. And 50 wet cards could easily merge into one.

When I got home, I found the package under a mountain of

snow. Thankfully, the cards were wrapped in plastic.

"Congratulations! Your project is complete," the note inside said. I cracked the inner packaging and noticed there weren't three photos on the card. There weren't two. There wasn't even one.

It was just a white card that said, "Happy holidays!"

The photograph of me in the snow was nowhere to be found.

What happened? I went online and, naturally, it was an autobot who handled customer service.

"How may I help and/or talk to you?" the bot said. When I typed in the problem, I got a terse response: "Choose from this list." None of the options was "no pictures on my card."

"Did I solve and/or address your problem?" the bot asked. When I typed "NO" three times, it quickly logged off.

I went back and discovered a person would answer the phone between 9 a.m. and 1 p.m. if I got in the queue before everyone else calling about missing Christmas card photos.

A customer representative got on the line and wondered how she could help. Missing photos stumped her.

"Let's look at your project," she said. She found the blank card. And she saw the photos that were supposed to be on it. "Oh," she said. "I'll try to recreate it and then you look at it."

When she was done, it looked like the post-Christmas pre-New Year's wonder I had crafted.

"Are you ready to order?" she asked.

Visions of more money down the drain danced through my head. And then she said the most amazing thing: "There's no charge. We made a mistake and we want you happy."

That alone could fill my 2023 list of highlights.

Now, if you happen to get it written on a card that says, "Happy Holidays 2022," don't say anything. The representative said I could keep the blank cards from 2022.

So I just may be ahead of the game.



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