



*Blue Skies of Texas*  
**COURIER**

**SUMMER 2017**



**SENIOR LIVING IN THE TRADITION OF AIR FORCE VILLAGE**



# Executive Report



## Chip Utterback

Lieutenant General, USAF RET  
President & CEO

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Viva Fiesta! The annual “Fiesta San Antonio” is all about celebrating our heroes, enjoying life, sharing with family, and “Partying with a Purpose.” The 11-day Party with a Purpose focuses the city on its sense of community and its commitment to caring for all of our citizens. There are many fascinating similarities between Fiesta and our very own Blue Skies. This place is party and fun central and, just as Fiesta honors the heroes of the Alamo, these halls of Blue Skies are full of magnificent remembrances of those who have served our nation. Our halls are also mirrors into the spirit of the women and men of Blue Skies – uniformed or not – who have served their communities as doctors, librarians, engineers, teachers and so much more. And like Fiesta, our halls are about caring for all our family.

You will find in this edition of the *Courier* compelling stories of sharing, acts of pure love, compassion and a community where no one is ever alone. One of the most magnificent elements of our Blue Skies is the hallmark Freedom House Alzheimer’s Care and Research Center. Every 66 seconds someone in the U.S. develops Alzheimer’s and it can deal a cruel hand to loved ones. It will sneak up on you and a full 35% of caregivers for people with dementias report their health has declined due to care responsibilities. We don’t let that happen here. For a fighter pilot like me, “mutual support” is a professional responsibility and it is comforting to know here on our campuses “mutual support” is also a personal way of life. Our residents have shared in these pages their inspiring stories of love and mutual support that reflect the spirit of our halls.

The golf course beckons every day in south Texas and the call to “Play for Freedom” comes through loud and clear. This year’s tournament to raise funds for Freedom House was the best ever! Many thanks to the Chair of our Air Force Villages Charitable Foundation, General (Ret) Paul Hester, for creating the “Numbered Air Force (NAF) Challenge,” which generated a competition between current and former NAF commanders to see who could raise the most. I’m proud to say the Mighty Eight Air Force led the way.

Our leadership in quality health services was further cemented by the graduation of our first class of Certified Nursing Assistants in April. I’m so proud of the folks who took on this challenging training and now are off and running in a new career with the Best of the Best – Blue Skies.

Finally, please read about our cottage modernization plan in the “Good Bones” article. It’s all good reading and it’s all about people taking care of people. Every day under our Blue Skies is a FIESTA!

We've Got

GOOD

BONES



Our grandparents used to look at old cars, appliances and buildings and say with a sigh, "They just don't make them like this anymore." They were usually right.

And if your grandparents could have seen the sturdy, well-built "bones" of our oldest cottages, some constructed at Blue Skies West three decades ago, they'd give their nod of approval. These homes, with their structurally sound foundations, were built to last. And they're nestled in tree-shaded neighborhoods, another allure to many Blue Skies residents.

Now these cottages need a fresh makeover ... so Blue Skies is modernizing them to better serve current residents and to welcome the next generation of retirees.

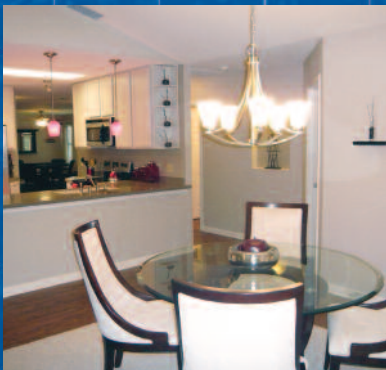
Modernization efforts have begun on the oldest of the two cottage neighborhoods - The Lakes - and will continue with The Oaks. Cottages will get a contemporary facelift that includes airy, well-lighted spaces with enhanced natural and built-in lighting; updated kitchens and baths with new tile, countertops and cabinetry; flooring; paint; and other upgrades under the

creative guidance of an interior designer. Exteriors will also get a new look, with decking and flagstone patios where practicable, and color schemes that blend and enhance the feeling of community.

"Many of our ideas have been inspired by residents who already modernized their cottages," says Fred Ryder, Chief Operating Officer. "These are solid homes with good bones. Cottage residents enjoy barbecuing outdoors, gardening, and using the walking trails along the green space and lakes. These homes are worthy of preserving."

He adds, "We listen to residents, we observe what they like, and we see this modernization effort as part of our commitment to continuously create the most modern, welcoming, beautiful environment for our residents."

One of the finest homebuilders in Texas will be doing these significant upgrades - a quality builder with national credentials. Ilene Kitchens, Director of Marketing, says, "When you see the amazing ideas that are putting new life into these 'old bones,' all you can say is WOW!"



# Freedom House

## A refuge for the memory-impaired, a respite for caregivers

Providing care to a spouse with dementia is an act of pure love. Knowing when to protect your own health and put your spouse in a safe refuge where 'round the clock care is delivered by compassionate professionals ... is the consummate act of love.

We talked with four Blue Skies residents whose stories of love and sacrifice share a common thread – the recognition that caregivers need respite, and the knowledge that Freedom House is a place where they can feel confident they've done the right thing for a beloved spouse.

### Colonel Bob Hess, D.D.S., USAF Ret.

Bob and Jeanne Hess moved to Blue Skies in 2012 when she was in the mid-stages of Alzheimer's. "We had planned this move before Jeanne began to lose her memory," said her husband of 62 years. "She did reasonably well for a while," but as her physical health deteriorated, he hired a home health provider to assist him.

He bought Jeanne a new piano, hoping it would spark her passion for playing. Remarkably, she played with ease even after she had forgotten how to do the most basic things. He sang alongside her for hours – memories he will long cherish.

He said the last year "absolutely wore me out. I was in great physical condition, but I had to watch her constantly ... I was awake 18-20 hours. It was heart-wrenching to see this strong-willed, independent person become a shell of who she had been."

He took care of her until "I just couldn't do it anymore."

Moving her to Freedom House "was the best move I ever made, but it was so hard. I felt I was breaking the contract we made when we married and promised to watch over each other."

In the end, she could not eat, and he lost her. Although the grief was overwhelming, he says he had been grieving for years as he watched her decline, and the end was, poignantly, a release.

From his painful experience, he offers guidance to friends whose spouses have memory issues, finding

solace in helping others. A retired dentist, Bob also finds comfort in the family he and Jeanne built together – four children (one deceased), two grandchildren and five great-grandchildren.

### Margaret Watkins

Margaret Ramey met Miles Watkins during WWII, and they lived together for 70 years, traveling, adding a son and daughter to their family, and always supporting each other.

They moved to Air Force Village in 1999. "This is home," she says as she looks around her comfortable, well-lit apartment with its beautiful views and an abundance of lush green plants that she lovingly attends.

Life was good until Miles began to forget things. A decorated pilot and a gregarious man, he slowly changed. "It took me a while to realize what was going on," Margaret recalls. "I just thought he was being difficult." She and her children looked for something to blame. "He had fallen and hit his head on a tree stump when we lived at Canyon Lake and we blamed that. Or we thought it might have been a result of 'flying into the fury in Vietnam.'" Whatever the cause, she told him, "We'll fight it together."

When he began to forget the basic tenets of driving, he reluctantly agreed to give his car to their grandson, with the help of Shirley Clay, Resident Counselor. (Shirley and other staff are always responsive to residents who need support in sensitive situations.)

When she could no longer handle the stress of caregiving, Miles understood and moved to Freedom House. "He was there only 10 months," she said. "I took our wedding photo to him and he didn't recognize it. Then I knew." He died shortly thereafter.

Margaret has since found comfort and support among fellow residents. "I attend a Share & Care group where we discuss our problems." And she keeps busy with many Blue



Bob & Jeanne Hess



Miles & Margaret Watkins

Skies activities, including her “Gay 90s” group, which refuses to let a little thing like being 90-something slow them down.

Blue Skies is a family affair. Margaret’s late mother lived here in the 1970s and her sister, Betsy Morris, lives at Liberty House Assisted Living. This truly is home.

## Lieutenant Colonel Steve Wilson, Ph.D., USAF Ret.

When Steve Wilson and his wife Mary Lynne were in their mid-50’s, immersed in busy, active careers, Mary Lynne began to exhibit symptoms that were utterly out of character. “She was very organized and sharp, a music and choir director. But she lost her sense of organization, forgot things. One day, she left to get her hair done and didn’t return home for hours. She called from an icehouse far away, lost. Then we took it seriously.”

She underwent a battery of tests and they recognized the signs; her father had had Alzheimer’s and she knew it could be hereditary. She’d tell Steve, “I’m feeling dumb dumb today.” He furiously searched for resources, starting online from scratch. “At times, I’d pull over to the side of the road and cry,” he says. He hired someone to help five days a week so he could work. Nonetheless, her mental and physical health declined.

He had to carry her up and downstairs. “She could no longer function in society. I talked her hairdresser into teaching me to wash and comb her hair. She started fires. She was diagnosed with Alzheimer’s and Parkinson’s with Lewy Body Dementia.” He had to change jobs to be closer to home and then had to quit that job. It took an enormous toll on his life.

“Finally, I moved her to the Village at Incarnate Word. It was the worst day of my life. You feel like you’re giving away everything meaningful to you.” She died in 2009.

In 2010, he married Mary Lynne’s dear friend, Brenda. “Our families had been intertwined for 35 years. Brenda and I moved to Blue Skies in 2011 – and the most important catalyst for coming here was my experience with Mary Lynne. I did not want my kids or Brenda to have to provide that level of care for me. Here, we have all the help we need. This was the best decision for both of us.”

He is active in the Cycling Club, Ham Radio Operators Club, taught the AARP Driver Safety Course, and shares his skills as a photographer to create marketing videos for Blue Skies. “There are a million things for us to



John & Lee Hargreaves

do here, he says.

He also encourages other residents who are caregivers to access the resources Blue Skies offers. “Caregivers become physically exhausted from worry, insufficient nourishment, too little sleep. It wears you down and there’s huge guilt.”

## Lee Hargreaves

Lee and John Hargreaves met in college. “It was a tennis court romance,” she says, reminiscing about her lifelong sweetheart. After graduation, they got married. He became a USAF Colonel – a pilot, researcher and educator, and she became an RN.

They raised three children, traveled, and retired in New Hampshire. In 1989, they moved to Blue Skies where they have made many friends and enjoyed a quiet life. It was a familiar place; John’s mother had resided at Blue Skies East in the late 1970s.

A few years ago, John began to have trouble remembering things, driving a car and working his computer. “Memory loss is sneaky,” Lee says. “At first, you’re not aware it’s happening.”

Lee reflects on John before he had Alzheimer’s. In the Air Force, he was a pilot and research scientist. “John lived in an environmental capsule for 30 days, helping pave the way for NASA astronauts,” she says. He also was an exercise enthusiast and taught water aerobics for 17 years at Blue Skies.

He had a stroke two years ago and she felt it best for him to move to Freedom House. The losses he has suffered leave him frustrated and she calls on her nursing skills to cheer him up. Nearly every day, she makes the five-minute walk from her apartment to visit her beloved husband of 62 years. Recently, she took him a Rubik’s Cube because he still likes to solve problems. But it’s tough on her, remembering who he was and seeing him as he is now.

“I advise anyone going through this to prepare for depression. You know Freedom House is the right place, but he’s there and I’m here and it is hard.” She finds comfort in the Share & Care group, and is grateful to be living in a community with support systems that make the unbearable slightly more bearable.

Her son and daughter-in-law shared with her some comforting words from their pastor: Accept the inevitable and you will find peace, and that has become her mantra.



Mary Lynne Wilson



**Numbered Air Force Challenge**

Kmart and Lorrie Kresge  
13 AF CC December 2010 - September 2012

Vicki and Bruce Carlso  
8 AF CC May 2002 - August 2005

Kevin and Cathy Chilton  
9 AF CC August 2005 - June 2008

Ed and Karen Eberhart  
Commander USAF 1st AF 198 - 1997

Thomas and Karen Keck  
8 AF CC January 2000 - May 2002

Paul and Lynda Hester  
9 AF CC September 1989 - November 2001

Chip and Sandy Utterback  
Commander 13 AF October 2008 - October 2009

Gary and Shelley North  
Commander 13 AF Air Force Center Command February 2008 - August 2009

Gen Ed and Mrs. Teresa Rice  
13 AF CC January 2005 - February 2008

Chuck and Sharon Buchanan  
9 AF CC and August 2007

Sharene and C.O. Brown  
Commander AFCCENT June 2015 - July 2016

John and Nancy Dolan  
9 AF CC June 2015 - August 2016

Maj Gen Bruce and Suzanne Smith  
Commander Air War College 1980 - 1987

Scott and Joanna Vander Hant  
13 AF CC October 1980 - 1981

Maj Gen Tom and Barb Bowers  
13 AF CC October 1980 - 1981

Rich and Amy Clark  
13 AF CC October 1980 - 1981

Chuck and Marilyn Wald  
13 AF CC January 2008 - November 2011

Mike and Barbie Nelson  
13 AF CC 1984 - 1985

Lt Gen Sam and Marci Angelella  
9 AF CC July 2012 - July 2015

Gen Ed and Mrs. Teresa Rice  
13 AF CC January 2005 - February 2008

Gen Ed and Mrs. Teresa Rice  
13 AF CC January 2005 - February 2008

Gen Ed and Mrs. Teresa Rice  
13 AF CC January 2005 - February 2008



Leonard Contracting

Above photo: General Paul Hester, USAF-Ret, (third from right), serves as Chair, Air Force Villages Charitable Foundation. In that capacity, he challenged past commanders of the Numbered Air Force (NAF) to compete in raising the most dollars for the Play for Freedom Golf Tournament. Twenty current and former NAF commanders battled to the finish, raising a record \$19,000. The winner: the Mighty Eighth Air Force. Thank you one and all.



Select Rehabilitation

# It's More Than A Golf Tournament...

On a sunny day in April, 32 teams competed for prizes in the 23rd Annual Play for Freedom Golf Tournament. You could feel the camaraderie among the players and sponsors who knew this was more than just a fun day on the golf course. It was a visible and financial commitment to Freedom House.

The record \$137,000 gross will make a marked difference in the lives of Freedom House residents. If you've ever visited Freedom House, you know it is extraordinary. From the gracious ambience, vibrant activities, fully-engaged staff and smiling residents to the loving volunteers who know each resident by name, it's just different.

The funds generated from this tournament support the highest standard of living for Freedom House residents. Importantly, Play for Freedom is the single largest contributor to staff training. Where the state requires direct caregivers to participate in 12 hours of annual training, Freedom House staff averages 39 hours. Nursing training and new employee training also far exceed state standards. This level of training sets Freedom House apart.

On behalf of our residents and their families, we extend deep gratitude to our loyal Play for Freedom sponsors and players for your generosity and caring hearts.

**PRESENTING SPONSORS**

**LIBERTY SPONSORS**

**PATRIOTIC SPONSORS**

Watch for our 2017 Annual Report where we will honor the Stars & Stripes Sponsors.

# CNA Training = Excellence

Seven beaming Graduate Nursing Assistants and their proud families celebrated the first graduating class for soon-to-be Certified Nursing Assistants (CNA) at Blue Skies in April, opening up a world of career possibilities. Upon passing the state exam, they will become CNAs.

Each of the graduates has been offered employment at Blue Skies, launching them into careers that specialize in care for seniors. Congratulating the group, Lt Gen Chip Utterback, CEO, noted that the core values at Blue Skies will guide them in their service – yet another benefit to residents in the community’s six licensed health care services.

At the festive ceremony, the graduates heaped praise on Becky Belew, RN, an educator and Blue Skies Hospice Case Manager, who conducted the six-week training. Belew said caring for seniors requires special skills, commitment and compassion, and this training ensures the CNAs will understand the unique culture of Blue Skies.

Wendy Carpenter, Chief Health Services Officer, said the training program helps Blue Skies attract



and retain quality staff. “We are using our accreditation status and modern facilities to improve senior care and expand the pool of an in-demand work force.”

Any of the graduates who might be interested in furthering their education to become LVNs or RNs may apply for a Mary Opal Wolanin scholarship. To date, the Blue Skies scholarship has supported the education of eight LVNs and seven RNs. Just another way we hold to our promise to Take Care of Our Own.

## High Flight Center Campaign Continues



Residents are excited about the proposed High Flight Center at Blue Skies West – a modern, accessible space for worship, live concerts, lectures and other gatherings for up to 250 people.

Construction will begin when the campaign goal is achieved, and it will serve residents on both campuses. Faith communities will enjoy improved seating, acoustics and private meeting places.

A resident-directed fundraising campaign has achieved nearly 60% of its \$4.4 million goal. Your gifts and pledges of support will help complete this needed facility. To learn how you can donate tax-advantaged IRAs or select naming opportunities with gifts of \$25,000+, please e-mail [HFC@BlueSkiesTx.org](mailto:HFC@BlueSkiesTx.org) or call (210) 568-3206.



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**Blue Skies West**  
**(210) 677-8666**

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

## OUR VISION

*We will redefine excellence in senior living through our relentless pursuit of innovation, service and care.*

## OUR MISSION

*Blue Skies of Texas is dedicated to quality retirement living with an emphasis on individual wellbeing.*



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## Secure Website For Donations

If you'd like to make a gift to Air Force Villages Charitable Foundation using your credit card, please go to [www.afvgiving.org](http://www.afvgiving.org) or <http://www.blueskiesoftexas.org/foundation/>. Your information is fully secure. Your friends at Blue Skies of Texas thank you.