



BEFORE THEY WERE VILLAGERS | C5
Rhonda Tracy used grants to start literacy and mentoring programs around the country.

6 a.m. 9 a.m. 12 p.m. 3 p.m. 6 p.m. 9 p.m.

61° 59° 60° 62° 56° 51°

ON THE HORIZON | C1
Homestead Recreation Center will include astronomy pads for stargazing and The Villages' seventh dog park.

ROETHLISBERGER EYES ONE LAST STAND, B2

Ben Roethlisberger has been flirting with the idea of retirement for years. This time, however, feels different. For the first time in his nearly two-decade career, the Pittsburgh Steelers quarterback did more than just hint that the end is near. It may finally be at hand.

The 39-year-old offered no guarantees. Yet the signs have been there for most of his 18th season.



Medicare Advantage Open Enrollment Is Here For Residents

HEALTH CARE IN THE VILLAGES

Counselors are available to help you double-check benefits, doctor lists before getting locked into a plan.

By CURT HILLS | Daily Sun Managing Editor

If you're among the rising number of seniors to join a Medicare Advantage plan, now is the time to give it a second look.

We all remember this fall's steady flow of television commercials and fliers that filled your mailbox with those enticing offers from insurance providers you didn't know existed previously, but the benefits sounded great, so you signed up.

But it's worth a double-check now to make sure a harsh reality doesn't set in later, such as learning that the new Medicare Advantage Plan you enrolled in won't allow you to see your



Nearly 27 million Americans can review their benefits and available medical provider network under their Medicare Advantage Plan. And if necessary, they can switch to another plan through March 31.

Please See **MEDICARE, A8**

ONLY IN THE VILLAGES

By Ryan Weiss

When Andy Miller watched his young daughter Deb first learn to swim, he never would've imagined what would happen almost a half-century later.

At last month's Florida Senior Games in Coral Springs, Miller and Deb Halterman brought home a combined 11 medals in swimming competition.

"I think it's really cool that we get to have these experiences together," said Halterman, of the Village of DeLuna. "I don't take it as seriously as Dad does. I do it because I want to do it with him."

Miller, 80, collected five medals in the men's 80-84

Please See **SWIMMING, A10**

BROTHERS IN SONG PREPARE FOR UPCOMING SPRING PERFORMANCE

For the first time since March 2020, the group plans to resume rehearsals — and welcomes Villages residents to join them. This month, the chorus is auditioning new members who will be able to perform at its next show in March. **D2**

ALSO

BUTTERFLY GARDEN CLUB MEMBERS HONOR THEIR CO-FOUNDER

Slideshow pays tribute to Lamar Young for his "outstanding contributions" to the club. **C3**

ALSO

VILLAGER OPERATES MODEL TRAINS THAT RUN ON STEAM POWER

Tom Bowdler's model trains follow in the footsteps of their large-scale cousins by running on steam. **C8**

COVID-19 | TRAVEL INDUSTRY SAFETY

Officials Urge Diligence To Keep Virus at Bay



Rebecca Blackwell | The Associated Press

Travelers make their way through Miami International Airport. Thousands of flights have been canceled or delayed as airlines face staffing shortages due to the rapid spread of the omicron variant of COVID-19.

Concerns about the fast-spreading omicron variant are prompting travelers to reconsider their vacation plans.

By MICHAEL SALERNO | Daily Sun Senior Writer

This Thanksgiving and Christmas, holiday travel outlooks suggested a return to almost normal travel volumes. But COVID-19's omicron variant dampened that optimism, as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported more than 75,900 new coronavirus cases in Florida as of Friday. That tally raises the seven-day average daily to 42,600, which is twice as high as it was at the peak of this summer's surge when the delta variant fueled a surge of infections in the state. Omicron's emergence in recent weeks has raised concerns in the tourism industry, not unlike the delta variant's arrival earlier in 2021. Travelers to and from Florida may notice air travel cancellations, stricter mask requirements at theme parks and stricter mask and testing requirements for cruise travel.

Please See **OMICRON, A10**

STATE & REGION

INFRASTRUCTURE NEWS

Giant Power Plant in Orange County to Get Concrete Makeover

The Orlando Utilities Commission wants to make it clear that the towers of a power plant that stand over east Orange County are not at risk of collapse. In fact, the projected timeline for the towers, one nearly 26 years old and the other 35, leaves them as landscape fixtures for another 20 years or so. The newer tower, however, has developed concrete troubles that need fixing soon at a cost of \$3.2 million. "It's a maintenance thing," said Wade Gillingham, OUC's vice president for production of electricity and water.

— Tribune News Service



Tribune News Service

Concrete inside the newer power plant is proving vulnerable to corrosion from cooling water.

430

Each plant has a 430-foot tower that provides a cooling function. Not all utilities equip their power plants with such cooling towers, rather choosing equipment more costly to maintain.

10M

The cooling towers guzzle nearly 10 million gallons of water daily — water that is highly treated sewage. Cooling water emerges at 120 degrees and with corrosive qualities of recycled sewage.

200K

The water flows into the cooling tower at a torrential 200,000 gallons a minute. Air rushes upward through the tower, carrying heat and water vapor into the atmosphere.

LOVIN' THE LIFESTYLE

Entertainment news today, **D2**

In recreation centers today, **D4-5**

Happening on the squares today, **D3**

What to watch on TV today, **D11**



6 905481 00001 5

from the front page

MEDICARE

Continued from A1

dedicated doctors anymore.

The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services allows Medicare Advantage plan holders to change to a different Advantage plan provider, if they wish. Known as Medicare Advantage Open Enrollment, it started Saturday and runs through March 31.

"It's a one-time chance to really switch back," said The Villages Health CEO Bob Trinh. "I will give credit to CMS for offering this."

Trinh said residents who carefully review their policy provisions may find their local health care network is really narrow, meaning there are few doctors available to them, and perhaps excluding their favorite doctors.

"They great benefits, but not worth it if I can't use them," Trinh said.

Within the community, trained volunteers with Serving Health Insurance Needs, or SHINE, help residents with any Medicare-related questions.

"Usually the first question we hear is 'I've got a Medicare Advantage plan, is it a good one?'" John Krier, SHINE's Lake and Sumter coordinator, said of fielding questions from residents.

Krier said SHINE counselors will help people review their benefits, but also the medical providers available to them to make sure it's convenient access for them. Sometimes the free consultation reinforces the choice a person made, sometimes not.

"Somewhere there is going to buyer's remorse," Krier said of a choice that can be corrected before April.

Emilio Noble, The Villages Health's vice president of sales and marketing, echoed the idea, saying now is the time for consumers to reflect on the choice they made.

"We want to make sure they have good health," he said.

MEDICARE CLASSES

The Villages Health offers "Medicare Simplified" classes to help people understand their choices. Register at thevillageshealth.com/medicare-resources/medicare-simplified-class/ or call 844-TVH-WELL (884-9355) with questions.

SHINE OFFERS FREE MEDICARE HELP

SHINE (Serving Health Insurance Needs of Elders) volunteers are available to assist clients with Medicare-related questions including about Medicaid, Medicare and Medigap plans, financial assistance and scams. The service is free and unbiased, and reservations are not taken.

Beginning this month, counselors are scheduled at the following locations to assist area residents for one on one counseling.

Eisenhower Recreation Complex: 9 - 11:30 a.m., first and third Wednesdays.

Chula Vista Recreation Center: 3 - 5:30 p.m., first and third Fridays.

Lake Miona Recreation Complex: 9 - 11:30 a.m., second and fourth Tuesdays.

Lady Lake Library: 2 - 3:30 p.m., second and fourth Wednesdays.

Beginning in February, "Understanding Medicare", a group presentation geared toward those turning 65, will be made at 1 p.m. on the second Wednesday of each month at the Aviary Recreation Center.

For more information, call 800-963-5337.

"And that includes a plan that supports that."

Noble said relationships with doctors is a worthy criteria to consider, so not switching to a plan that would disrupt that doctor-patient relationship may be a high priority.

In a moder-day medical world in which some medical providers are trying to rush through a volume of patients to be profitable, The Villages Health employs a model that centers around the patient, including devoting up to an hourlong appointment for a new patient or someone engaged in an annual wellness visit. Follow-up visits are designed for up to 30 minutes.

"This is what sets us apart," Noble said.

Among its seven primary care centers and two specialty care centers, it routinely ranks at the top for both quality of care and patient experience for the more than 52,000 patients it serves.

Some patients may not want to walk away from that as Sophie Ferentz, The Villages Health's marketing manager experienced last month. She said she received a call from a patient who had switched to a Medicare Advantage plan that didn't include The Villages Health doctors in its network. Ferentz was able to advise

the patient he can correct his earlier choice and retain his preferred doctors, she said.

"We have three major plans that capture almost everyone," Noble said. "We're exclusive when it comes to the quality of care we want to deliver."

The Villages Health accepts Medicare Advantage plans from UnitedHealthcare, Florida Blue and Humana. Trinh said they selected them because they're all national brands, so residents here likely had them already as an insurance provider before moving here. They may have been connected with those insurance providers before they became Medicare-eligible at age 65.

"Many times, people want to keep those brands," he said. "They want to stick with what they know."

Trinh said the three also are top-rated on national and Florida ratings, making them logical choices to accept at The Villages Health.

If patients find Medicare a little cloudy to navigate, The Villages Health provides a "Medicare Simplified" class that can help provide answers so they can make the best choice possible. Classes are offered online and in-person, with registration available at thevillageshealth.com under the Medicare classes tab. Those with questions can reach

out to The Villages Health at 844-TVH-WELL (884-9355).

Additionally in the community, SHINE has trained volunteers available to meet with residents at select recreation centers and the Lady Lake Public Library. For more information, call 800-963-5337. SHINE operates under the Florida Department of Elder Affairs.

"We were very busy in Sumter County, or essentially in The Villages," Krier said of the earlier just completed annual enrollment period. "Most of the questions were on Medicare Advantage."

Krier said SHINE expects those questions to continue, especially with relatively new benefits, such

as offering dental and vision. Counselors will help point out criteria that Medicare Advantage subscribers can consider, he said.

Medicare Advantage is sometimes referred to as "Part C" or "MA plan." These plans provide medical and hospital coverage, but offered by Medicare-approved private companies. CMS' Office of Enterprise Data and Analytics reports approximately 27 million seniors in the U.S. in 2021 enrolled in Medicare Advantage plans, up from just over 22 million two years earlier.

Curt Hills is a managing editor with the Daily Sun. He can be reached at (352) 753-1119, ext. 5287 or curt.hills@thevillagesmedia.com.

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