Shenanigans at AFRH-W

AFRH-WASHINGTON

Story & Photos by Marla J. McGuinness | Recreation Specialist

March 17 is St. Patrick’s Day and the recreation department was full of fun! We offered green sour apple punch shots, treats from dining, green rice krispie squares and green beer. There were trivia contests to guess how many clovers in a jar and lots of green foods, music, dancing, drinking and a whole lot of green. Irish Americans wear the green as a reminder that they are nationalists first and foremost. The colors of the Irish flag are green, white and orange, the green symbolizing the Irish nationalism, the orange symbolizing the Orangemen of the north and the white symbolizing peace. The most common St. Patrick’s Day symbol is the shamrock. The shamrock is the leaf of the clover plant and a symbol of the Holy Trinity.

Gulfport resident Dan Ellis organized the parade on March 17 that went down the Boardwalk at AFRH-G right before lunchtime. Thank you to all the residents who took the time to dress up, decorate and go all out on this fun day. I think everyone needed this boost. Happy St. Paddy’s Day everyone!

AFRH-G St. Patrick’s Day parade

Photos by Becki L. Zschiedrich | Public Affairs

St. Patrick’s Day observes the death of St. Patrick, the patron saint of Ireland. He is said to have died on March 17 in or around the year 493. He grew up in Roman Britain, but was captured by Irish raiders and taken to Ireland as a slave when he was a young adult. After some years he returned to his family and entered the church, like his father and grandfather before him. He later returned to Ireland as a missionary and worked in the north and west of the country.

The holiday has evolved into a celebration of Irish culture with parades, special foods, music, dancing, drinking and a whole lot of green. Irish Americans wear the green as a reminder that they are nationalists first and foremost. The colors of the Irish flag are green, white and orange, the green symbolizing the Irish nationalism, the orange symbolizing the Orangemen of the north and the white symbolizing peace. The most common St. Patrick’s Day symbol is the shamrock. The shamrock is the leaf of the clover plant and a symbol of the Holy Trinity.

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AFRH-G St. Patrick’s Day parade

Photos by Becki L. Zschiedrich | Public Affairs

On March 12, 2021 the Gulfport residents were told the gates were going to open at noon. It’s been about a year since the residents have been able to leave the property due to COVID. The vibe around the Home is much better now that the residents have been allowed to venture outside the gates. Resident Ray Ross left in his convertible Mustang with the top down and the music blaring. Employees from AbilityWorks and recreation waved as the residents drove by. Many residents said that they have just been enjoying getting in their cars and driving down Highway 90 along the beach. It’s so nice to see so many smiling faces again around AFRH-G. Please continue to practice social distancing and please wear your mask out in public. We can beat this!

DC residents join the world in becoming citizen scientists for the Great Backyard Bird Count

By Linda Bailey, CTRS | Recreation Specialist

Photo by Hilary Rosado | AFRH-W Resident

Since 1988, people from around the world become “citizen scientists” on the second weekend in February. By identifying, counting and reporting the birds they see in their own backyard, they take part in the Great Backyard Bird Count.

We have a pretty big backyard here at AFRH-W, and five of our residents braved the winter weather, went out to count the birds, and report their findings. Hilary Rosado, Norma Rambo, Lillian Miller, Frank Parker and Jean McCarthy all took on the challenge.

They spotted 16 varieties of birds. In addition to the everyday geese, cows, robins, cardinals, blue jays, sparrows and starlings, also spotted were hawks, mockingbirds, thrashers, mourning doves, nuthatches, tufted titmouse, juncos, and two types of woodpeckers.

The count took place from February 12-15. Participants could count for as little as 15 minutes on any or all of the days of the long weekend. Their count sheets were turned into recreation, and the totals were added to the count. They were then compiled by citizen scientists all over the world and used by the Audubon Society, and the Cornell University Lab of Ornithology. Global counts happen four times a year. The next bird count is Global Big Day, which takes place Saturday, May 8, 2021.

Pictured is a bald eagle, taken on the grounds of AFRH-W. He did not make his appearance during the Great Backyard Bird Count, but we do see one occasionally.
AFRH-W resident highlight - Fred and Sophia Ebner

By P.K. Knor | AFRH-W Resident

Both Fred and Sophia are originally from Florida (and they also retired there). Fred and Sophia met at Palm Beach Junior College in Florida over 65 years ago. Fred met a Navy recruit in 1961 and was thrilled by the idea of working on a nuclear submarine. After boot camp and electricians training school, he attended Sub School in Groton, Connecticut. After Fred’s first tour, on the USS Trigger, a diesel sub, he attended several nuclear power schools and was assigned for 3-4 years to the nuclear sub, the USS Daniel C. Denison, where he spent most of his time at sea. Before reporting to the Dice, Fred and Sophia got married. After two years aboard the Dace, Fred was sent to B School in Waukegan, Michigan. While there, their first daughter was born. Next he reported to another new nuclear sub, the USS Sea Devil out of Little Creek, VA. Again this assignment was spent mostly at sea.

Eight years and more time spent on the road with schools and at sea than with family, Fred and Sophia decided to leave the Navy and move to Ft. Pierce, Florida, with the consideration of possibly joining the Coast Guard Reserve. Sophia was pregnant with their second child and was still working. Fred joined the Coast Guard thinking that he would be home more than gone, but...this was not the case.

After Coast Guard Training in Norfolk, Virginia, Fred’s first tour was aboard a 50 year old search and rescue cutter the Cherokee, an electrician. He was then assigned to the Coast Guard Cutter Dauntless in Miami, Florida. But, the Coast Guard was now also conducting law enforcement patrols out of Miami and again he was away from home regularly.

Fred was an E-7 at this time, but he made the Warrant Officer list. So, after WO School and a short assignment on the U.S. Coast Guard Cutter Dependable in Panama City, Florida, the “entire family” was sent to Woods Hole, Massachusetts, where Fred was assigned to the U.S. Coast Guard Cutter Bitterweet. The Bitterweat had an icebreaker hull, so again, he was away and busy during all the seasons. The family loved Cape Cod, but knew it would be too expensive to retire there, so they moved back to Florida to retire and give their daughters a chance to make lifelong friends and finish school. Fred was again assigned to the USCGC Dependable in Panama City for the remainder of his service.

Fred retired as a CWO3 and was able to do what he loved, be a handyman (something he had done all his life) and Sophia continued to work out of their home as a certified cancer data abstractor collecting data for the state of Florida. They moved to Daytona, Florida and Sophia traveled with her own business, and Fred accompanied her!

Their two married daughters Julie and Laura live in Maryland and Tennessee.

When they decided to downsize, they saw an ad for AFRH in the Submariners Magazine, came for a visit, and found what they were looking for. Both are involved in many functions and activities at AFRH-W. They both swim for exercise. Fred also likes woodworking, ceramics and reading. Sophia likes hand-crafts (sewing, embroidery, etc.), genealogy and ceramics.

They have traveled to 47 states and 11 countries since retiring and hope to take advantage of all of the great places to visit in the D.C., Maryland, and Virginia areas.

AFRH-G resident highlight - Cecil E. Riggs

Story & Photo by Lori Kems | Librarian

Cecil E. Riggs was born in West Virginia in 1936. He was one of seven children raised in a small community of about 35 families. His father, a foreman in a street car shop, and one other man were the only guys in the community that had occupations other than coal miner. As Cecil got older, he understood he did not want to be a coal miner or railroader and also knew that there were not many job opportunities in the area. One day he and a buddy saw the infamous Uncle Sam “We Want You” poster and they both made the decision to join the military. In 1954, Cecil and his buddy joined the Air Force. They headed off for basic training together but never saw each other again.

Cecil had always dreamed of visiting Washington State, Australia, and Germany. While in the military, Cecil had married and had two sons, Bruce and Douglas. He had also started up two businesses in the fire and burglary alarm industry, in addition to dabbling in construction. After retirement he continued to work with these businesses until about a year later when he decided to begin his civilian career as a firefighter. He worked another 20 years in fire service before retiring with a total of 40 years of firefighting working his way up the ladder to every firefighter rank including captain and chief.

After retirement, he decided to do a little more construction work before he and his second wife, Faith, bought a motor home to travel the country. In 2017, Faith passed away. After his daughter passed away, Faith became his rock. He and Faith were inseparable. Cecil does not want to be alone and hopes to take advantage of all of the great places to visit in the D.C., Maryland, and Virginia areas.

Cecil still writes. He’s already written other books entitled: Starting over Again, Retirement Life, Haunted House and Other Halloween Tricks, Green Acres, Self-Sermon to Happiness, and My Roommate. He also has other works in the process. When he is not writing, he likes to keep himself busy. His most recent escapade was a trip to Walmart where he discovered how expensive groceries have gotten! He was also very pleased to finally make a trip to visit his wife’s grave. Cecil has not had the opportunity to travel to Australia (yet!).
Happy 100th Birthday Mr. Oliveira!

**Story & Photos by Jen Biernacki | Recreation Therapy Assistant**

On Saturday February 27, 2021 John Oliveira celebrated his 100th birthday at AFRH-West with family from all over the country! Family “Zoomed” in from Washington, California, Missouri and other states to share his expressions of “Happy Birthday” to Mr. John Oliveira. A large screen TV accommodated the many family members participating in on the zoom call. As the yellow box highlighted the “speaker,” Mr. Oliveira followed along. He conversed and reminisced about family events that shared laughter among all. He also shared wisdom, encouragement and support as the yellow box traveled around to all the family members on the TV screen. Family members came and left throughout the call...but each knowing what a special time it was...so valuable beyond all...to share in such an experience...as “Grampa O” is now 100. When the call ended, Mr. Oliveira stated, “That was my best party!”

Celebrating Black History Month on Assisted Living

**Story & Photos by Amanda Jensena, CTRS | Recreation Therapist**

AFRH-W recognized and celebrated Black History Month throughout February. Some residents on Assisted Living (AL) had asked me what we were doing to celebrate on the unit. Over the entire month, we featured a total of 24 influential and well-known Black Americans (both historical and modern-day figures) whose pictures and facts about their lives rotated between the two AL floors. They included Hank Aaron, Rosa Parks, Maya Angelou, Kamala Harris, Colin Powell, Harriet Tubman, and many more. Did you know that a Black American woman was at the forefront of the creation of the Moderna COVID vaccine? Her name is Dr. Kizzmekia Corbett and she works at National Institute of Health. The residents enjoyed reading and learning about the different individuals and their contributions.

Like father, like son

**By Christine Baldwin and Marla McGuiness | AFRH-W Recreation**

We know Joe’s Nesnow’s story (April 2019 Communicator) and how the U.S. Navy led him to become an actor! In fact, we have even enjoyed his performances here at the Home. Now, he has shared stories about his father, Harry, who also was in the Navy. Harry began as an enlisted man in 1917 and worked his way up to earning a commission. Anyone who understands the stratification of the Navy in those days, knows that for a Jewish youth from the New York’s lower East Side to accomplish this is quite a feat. While serving during WWII, Harry’s vessel hit a cargo ship in the New York harbor and sank. While in the water, Harry was able to save five men! Joe’s Dad wasn’t much of a talker, so Joe didn’t know much about his career. In fact, he found out about this act of bravery from reading an article about it!
From the AFRH-W administrator

It feels like a lot has happened since last month. We lost an hour due to daylight savings time, the robins are back, flowers are starting to pop out of the earth and cherry blossoms are showing their colors. But most importantly, the best thing to change has been the pilot program to open up the campuses. Each day the information is coming out, it felt like the best day ever. Even though we didn't have many leave our campus, you could still feel the positive energy as residents knew they could depart, if they wanted to. We also were able to open up some visitation for our upper level of care residents so that they also could spend time with family and friends after such a long time apart. We have been able to complete second doses of the COVID-19 vaccine and more staff and contracts and are getting ready to roll out the third week. We continue to have good results with our testing program, most of it done now here at the Home, with our rapid testing kits, and random follow-up laboratory PCR tests. Many thanks as always to the Walter Reed National Military Medical Center staff for their great vaccination and testing support, to the Defense Health Agency for their supply support, and to the Pentagon for their security patrols and new wastewater testing for COVID-19 to ensure we do not have any cases. Thankfully, so far, they have not detected any.

This month we honor women and the history that they helped to create. I know I am thankful for the women veterans that forged the path so that I could serve. It is always great to honor our centenarians and this month we celebrated Mr. Harry Dressler who has lived an amazing life. Happy Birthday! Our facilities team had great fun this month celebrating that March holiday when everyone is celebrating that March holiday when everyone is celebrating St. Patrick’s Day with a leprechaun. There was lots of green for everyone on St. Patrick’s Day to include green beer, gelatin shooters, and pictures with leprechauns. All lots of fun! Our Defender’s Inn is back as well, now that we can open up activities. It is always great to honor our centenarians and this month we celebrated Mr. Harry Dressler who has lived an amazing life. Happy Birthday! Our Defender’s Inn is back as well, now that we can open up activities.

DC Administrator Susan Bryhan celebrates St. Patrick’s Day with a leprechaun.

Susan Bryhan

AFRH-Washington highlights

Dr. Rong Hu this National Doctors’ Day

Story & Photo by Carolyn Haug | Public Affairs

National Doctors’ Day is held each year on March 30 in the United States. It is a day to celebrate the contribution of physicians who serve our country by caring for its members. This year the event occurred on March 30, 1933. Charles B. Almond’s wife, Eudora Brown Almond, wanted to have a day to honor physicians. With a lot of hard work and perseverance the day was passed through both houses of Congress and was signed into law by President Roosevelt.

Q. Tell us about your background – education/work experience.
A. Prior to working at AFRH, I had worked as an inpatient hospitalist and outpatient primary care physician, where I honed my experience handling various medical conditions. Earlier in my career, I pursued medical research at Johns Hopkins Medical Institutions, which broadened my clinical knowledge through deeper understanding of the pathophysiology of the disease process while sharpening my analytical skills.

Q. What motivated you to choose this career path?
A. Growing up, my father was a doctor and my mother was a pharmacist, so choosing to be a physician was natural for me.

Q. Do you have a typical day like day?
A. My days start with housekeeping tasks, such as checking schedules, emails, labs, and x-rays. Then, I take sick calls, followed by regular appointments, and I end the day with medication refills and various administrative tasks. If I am on-call, I will take calls after hours.

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The military life of AFRH-G resident Michael Moran

By Dan Ellis | AFRH-G Resident

Michael Moran was born on July 22, 1954 to Thomas J. and Margaret M. Moran at Albany, New York where he attended St. James Catholic Elementary and Christian Brothers Academy. Following the death of his father, his mom moved to Burlington, Vermont where Mike graduated in 1972 from Burlington High School.

After his high school graduation Mike enlisted in the Army and completed his basic training at Fort Dix, New Jersey and matriculated through advanced individual training specializing in heavy equipment operation and maintenance (62F) with a concentration on 25-ton cable cranes. He was transferred to Hanaa, Germany with the 122nd Maintenance Battalion, and then stationed at Fort Devens, Massachusetts, where he performed refueling of helicopters.

Mike was then asked to join the USA Honor Guard at Fort Eustis, Virginia, where he performed precision drill and burial duties until his discharge in 1979.

Upon his first discharge, he joined and served two years in the U.S. Navy Seabee Reserves. His civilian employment included working as a turbine operator at a major electric generating station in New England. In seeking employment advancement, Mike took welding and management courses made available through the GI Bill.

In November 1979, he reenlisted in the U.S. Army, and by regulation he once more processed through basic training at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri.

He matriculated through advanced individual training at Fort Sam Houston, Texas, where he was trained as a veterinary food inspection specialist (91F) and spent the next twenty years performing duties as a health inspector, and plus assignments supporting four of the five branches of military service.

For nearly nine years, Mike’s duties assignments in San Antonio, Texas was as an instructor of food inspection and sanitation, instructor/writer and duties as staff services NCO.

While stationed West Point, New York for three years he was in charge of the cadet mess sanitation and quality control. At West Berlin, Germany he postured three years as NCO in charge of the 168th Medical Detachment for Veterinary Service.

While at MCAIS Iwakuni, Japan for three years he was NCO in charge of Veterinary Service for U.S. Military interests in Southern Japan.

During his final tour, Mike served three years at RAF Bentwaters, Finkswalke, England as the USDA procurement quality assurance NCO for beef and pork while overseeing slaughterhouse details, including procurement and grading of shelled eggs.

While performing his duties in the Army, Mike was a single parent to his son Michael Joseph. Mike’s son is currently a lawyer.

Following Mike’s military retirement with the rank of E-7 in 1999, the U.S. Navy hired him as a relocation assistance program manager at the fleet and family support center in Sigenella, Sicily. His primary duties were to assist active-duty service members, DoD civilians and their families with information and services associated with moving to or leaving Sigenella.

He was later employed at Conagra Foods in Quincy, Michigan as a quality assurance inspector. This engagement was followed by a stint with homeland security as a security screener. His duties were to screen all passengers and carry-on luggage plus he was responsible for passenger safety and detection of potential trouble at security checkpoints.

While Mike was making his decision to move to AFRH-Gulfport, he had first made two exploratory trips from his place in New York. The first was in 2018. He even stayed overnight in guest rooms on both occasions and visited with staff members, as well as residents.

He then submitted his application and received his admittance confirmation and he put his home up for sale, which immediately sold in late June 2020.

After Mike gave his farewells to New York, AFRH-G paused his admission due to Covid-19’s effect on the Home. This was a time of uncertainty and unknown criticality, since some of the residents had tested positive. However Mike was on the road and had arrived in Gulfport on July 13 where he found it necessary to stay at a motel. There was no going back to New York. Later, he rented a room in a private house to reduce his expense outlay, which, at the end of this time frame was nearly $5,000.00.

Upon notification of his arrival, AFRH set admissions guidelines dictated by the prevalence of Covid within the Home. The AFRH administration alerted the resident services staff and the wellness center. On August 26, Mike received a call from the admissions confirmation confirming his enrollment, providing his entry would take place within 24 hours due to the criticality of the virus. The call took place while he was in his automobile and stopped at a traffic light, then Bang! He was rear-ended. With no time to have his car repaired, he arrived at the Home the following day, August 27, 2020.

Having finally arrived, Mike brought with him his longtime avocation of designing, printing and making pin buttons and magnets. This activity started as a hobby while printing ID buttons for his rock & roll band buddies as a youngster. Mike has continued printing buttons freely for residents, which primarily offer informative or motivational messages. Joining with the resident “Doodlers” parading group, he printed an abundant variety of Mardi Gras themed buttons.

Notes from the AFRH-G resident advisory committee chairman

By Dennis Crabtree | Recreation Specialist

One year ago, this month we recognized we were about to be exposed to an infectious disease called COVID-19. The word “pandemic” could be heard around the world. Many health organizations began looking for vaccines to counteract this coronavirus that was attacking the respiratory system of humans. Most vulnerable are the elderly. Because our average age is 83 years and DoD’s efforts to protect us, our campuses (D.C. and Gulfport) were closed to all except essential personnel. We began wearing face masks, washing and sanitizing hands and maintaining social distance from each other that we still continue through this day.

I am writing this article early in anticipation of departing on leave in the 15th of this month. I had hoped for an “open gate policy” before my departure. Sadly that will not happen. I understand there could be a modified open gate policy before the end of the month. What is important to know is whatever leave policy we have will be tied to the positivity rate in Harrison County, Mississippi. The mask wearing requirement for the state of Mississippi has been rescinded, but that does not include this campus, or us, because we are federal. So, when you go out please continue to practice good health protocols to avoid reintroducing COVID to our campus. Enjoy your outings and stay safe.

Arthur “Art” W. Jones

AFRH-G RAC Chair Art Jones in the dining hall on St. Patrick’s Day.

Dennis has a passion for the history and culture of his native state of Mississippi where he was born and raised. He moved to North Carolina to attend Morehead State University. After graduation, he attended Mississippi State University for a master’s degree. He has worked at the NCAA while coaching the women’s basketball team before moving to the Armed Forces Retirement Home, where he is currently a resident and recreation specialist. He enjoys reading history, writing about his travels, and watching SEC basketball and football. He has recently started an Audible book club to share both book and travel recommendations with fellow “AFRH-Gs.”
Nursing Skills Fair with a Hawaiian flair

Story & Photos by Carolyn Haug | Public Affairs

Over the past year, our creative staff have become adept at turning lemons into lemonade. So when this year’s Nursing Skills Fair rolled around, in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic and a lengthy hiatus on exotic vacations, our team decided to host the fair with a Hawaiian Luau theme. “We couldn’t leave or be able to go on vacation, so we made our own vacation scenario and decided to have a Hawaiian Luau,” said Saidat Sogbesan, RN and Olayinka Telli, LPN; Nutrition and Dysphasia led by Leslie Boggus, RD; Mental Health and Dementia led by Elaine Fry and Nakeisha Williams and Low COVID-19. Staff had appointed times to attend the fair in order to maintain a safe environment for education and instruction. Stations were set up throughout the Community Center and Interim Health Educator at AFRH-Washington.

The American Woman - and “The Right to Vote!”

By Marla J. McGuinness Recreation Specialist

March is National Women’s History Month. AFRH dedicated a play that tells about the history of women voting to 120 residents. The 100 years of the years and the hardships of fighting for the right to vote. We take it for granted as women that these rights have always been there, but that is not the case. Women like Susan B Anthony, Emily Dickinson, Susan B Anthony, Susan B Anthony. Sarah Girtke amongst others have paved the way. One-hundred-one years ago, women struggled to get their vote and a voice in running the country. The min-script was shown in the theater and in the hallway for all to view.

AFRH-Washington

EAT WELL, LIVE WELL

By Teresa Hui, RD LD | Supervisory Dietitian

Do you remember walking in the halls of LaGrande, Pipes, Foxwood, Barnes, King Hall, and the old Scott Buildings? How about when USSAH was renamed AFRH? It feels like just yesterday when food service manager/dietitian to oversee nutrition counseling to 2,300 residents and an extensive mess hall meal preparation and delivery system. Previously, I held positions as chief dietitian at 380-bed acute care Suburban Hospital in Bethesda Maryland, patient food service manager at 1,200-bed Johns Hopkins University Medical Center in Baltimore, Maryland and at 500-bed Georgetown University Hospital in Washington DC. My education background is in food and nutrition science from Vanderbilt University (graduate coursework/interimship) and New Mexico State University (undergraduate degree). Food is my passion and nutrition science is my curiosity! I truly enjoy working with all residents and staff at AFRH. Serving America’s distinguished veterans for the past 39 years has been a highlight of my career.

Let’s eat well and live well together!

AFRH W’s Black History Month virtual celebration

By Linda Bailey, CRTS | Recreation Specialist

Photos by Steve Briefs | Recreation Supervisor & Marine Robbins | Volunteer Coordinator

Covid 19 limited our annual Black History Month event at AFRH- Washington to a virtual event. Last year, our History Month events were some of the last events that brought the community and AFRH together. This year, along with President Lincoln’s Cottage, we recorded those individuals who present our program. This year’s theme was the Black Family: Representation, Identity and Diversity. Staff members and AFRH residents provided photos of their family members to be a part of a gallery displayed in the tunnel between the Scott and Sheridan buildings. These photos also appeared in the opening of the video program. George Johnson read our poem, “The Black Family Pledge” by Maya Angelou. This year’s song was “It Don’t Have to Change,” played on the piano by Admissions Director, Jackie Halstead and sung by resident John Lott. Due to a piece of video magic, three of John’s brothers, Vertis, Raymond and Roland, were the backup singers. You can watch this video, along with the video of the poem recital, on the Official AFRH Facebook page. Usually, the Black History Month program has a guest speaker. This year, in place of a speaker, President Lincoln’s Cottage arranged for The Smithsonian Institute Museum of African American History to produce a video on tracing your ancestry. Other players in this video were Billy Bowen acting in his usual role as MC, Chaplain Goodloe who offered the Invocation and our administrator Susan Byrham, who thanked the residents for their efforts in putting this program together. We cannot forget our Volunteer Coordinator Marine Robbins, who, thanks to her technical expertise, puts all of this into one video, shown for all of our residents on Channel 4, Senior TV, our in-house channel.

MARCH 31, 2021

AFRH-Washington
Got rhythm? Of course you do...Drum it up returns!

By Susan Bergman, MT-BC | Board Certified Music Therapist

Photos by Carol Davis | Recreation Assistant

Got rhythm? Of course you do on Fridays in March as Drum it up drumming returns. On Friday, March 12, 2021, residents on Loyalty Hall along with II, resident volunteers, John and Ed, Simmons, joined in for a social distance, face covered morning of fun. Warmed up with various hand percussions, residents increased their concentration and listening skills to shake along and stop on cue. Giggles could be heard, oh...no...was it because someone decided to dance along, she said “we’re going to be dancing again!” No...Continuing along into a rhythm wave of shockers around the circle and once stopped, residents got to pick which direction the wave of sound would continue to move. Would it be right or left? It was then time to take some deep breaths and stretch out those arms and hands before moving on to the drums.

On a variety of Buffalo Drums, Bucket Drums, Lollipop Drums, Hand Drums, and Djembes, residents added rhythms to a recording of music therapist, Christina Stever’s, "I am a Tower of Strength" followed by daylight teasing of rhythms between residents and Susan. Afterwards, Bob said, "Got a trumpet? I used to play." Well, the next best thing was grooving along to Al Hirt’s “Java.” As the group began to reminisce about past musical instrument playing, you could hear, "Got a clarinet?" which led right into Benny Goodman’s “Sing, Sing, Sing” and more rhythm jamming. To conclude, “Curt gave the morning two thumbs up. Bob said, “It was relaxing,” Mitchell (known to all as “ski”) said, "You got me moving." "101" young Lois said, "I picked me up," and Mary raised her arms in the air saying, "Happy! Happy! Happy!" While gathering the instruments, someone said, "What about the rock-n-roll?" which led to resident, "Ski" jumping up to dance some smooth moves to “Splish Splash!”

The morning proved that we all got Rhythm and much, much more! We look forward to Valor Hall and Allegiance Drum it Up! If you can move your feet, clap your hands or snap those fingers “You Got Rhythm, too!”

What luck! A sweet treat Valentine & sham- rockin' pot of gold!

Story & Photos by Susan Bergman, MT-BC | Recreation Services

What luck! Since this past December, Deidra Obrien and her fellow staff and workers have adopted AFRH-Gulfport residents in the healthcare areas with the mission to bring cheer, personalized messages, and to remind them that they are not forgotten during these challenging times. On Friday, February 12, 2021, you could hear, “A Valentine...for me?” Once peering in and then opening their red and white heart covered treat bags, healthcare residents were delighted to find Hershey’s kisses, Oreo cookies, candy, a handmade stuffed patriotic heart ornament, and a personalized Valentine card.

On Wednesday, March 17, 2021, residents were once again surprised with a handmade mug rug fabric coaster in which a mini pot of gold filled treats fit so perfectly for St. Patrick’s Day! Bev Brady and Toyel Mook were the amazing sewing fingers, “You Got Rhythm, too!”

Lois said, “It picked me up,” and Mary raised her arms in the air saying, “Happy! Happy! Happy!” While gathering the instruments, someone said, “What about the rock-n-roll?” which led to resident, “Ski” jumping up to dance some smooth moves to “Splish Splash!”

The morning proved that we all got Rhythm and much, much more! We look forward to Valor Hall and Allegiance Drum it Up! If you can move your feet, clap your hands or snap those fingers “You Got Rhythm, too!”

Hook and Ring tournament

Story & Photos by Dennis Crabtree | Recreation Specialist

There could only be four winners that day! Wayland Webb took 1st place, Ernie Fowler took 2nd place, Jerry Anderson took 3rd place and Fred Van Pelt took 4th place. Fred Van Pelt won a ice cream sandwich for 4th Place.

Mystery game

By Dennis Crabtree | Recreation Specialist

On March 8, 2021, recreation held its mystery game. The mystery game was not given out until 09:30 and it was called the Reverse Washer Toss. Residents were given instructions on how to play. The washer toss boards were reversed, which made the board go downward instead of upward. All of the residents were six-feet away during the game.

There could only be four winners for this mystery game. But wait, there was a rule change for the four winners and all residents who played were all winners. Fourth place went to Jerry Anderson, who got to pick four snacks. Third place went to Earl Gassery, who got to pick three snacks. Second place went to Sharon Price, who got to pick two snacks and first place went to Wayland Webb, who got to pick one snack.

Washer toss tournament

Story & Photo by Dennis Crabtree | Recreation Specialist

On March 16, 2021 residents competed in the first washer toss tournament in the Bocce Center since the Covid-19 shutdown. The object of the tournament was to throw the washers for points. Whoever had the most points at the end advanced in the single elimination bracket. All the residents were seen concentrating for all the points that they could get in their throw.

There could only be four winners that day. Wayland Webb took 1st place, Jerry Anderson took 2nd place, Fayje Jefferson took 3rd place and Don Blaylock took 4th place. Don Blaylock won an ice cream sandwich for 4th Place.

What about some competition – Indoor Shuffleboard!

Story & Photo by Susan Bergman, MT-BC | Recreation Therapy Services

On Thursday, March 4 & March 11, 2021 Mitchell “ski” Kieslawicz, along with independent living resident Ed Simmons met up in the bocce center for a friendly game of indoor shuffleboard.

Little did I know, Ski is quite the indoor shuffleboard player and will rarely let another player get a point on him. Back when Ski first moved into the Home in November 2019, he and Ed Simmons began a friendship of comrades as they were neighbors up on the eighth floor in the “A” Tower. Ed had never played indoor shuffleboard before meeting Ski and it was thrilling to have gained a few points to take the lead and win one game. They each seemed to tease each other, dish out the rivalry, and brighten with laughter and delight. The real story is, I was playing red on one side and Ed was playing on the other side with Ski walking back and forth. The next day Ski said, “They ganged up on me, how could I win?” I’m sure this will never ever happen again since Ski is a truly professional indoor shuffleboard competitor. He played throughout his years in the Navy quickly followed by the Air Force as he played on many of the bases where he was stationed. Lots of laughs, competition, comradery, and good times had to be ever during indoor shuffleboard with Ed & Ski.

Lucky life Irish & much more cook-in!

By Susan Bergman, MT-BC | Recreation Therapy Services

On Wednesday, March 10, 2021, healthcare residents enjoyed a “Lucky of the Irish” cook-in. With the Loyalty Dining Hall decked out in the green, orange, and white decor of the Irish flag, residents enjoyed their comedic St. Patrick’s Day funnies handout. “Top of the Morning to You!” could be heard along with “Woo! That’s a lot of green?” Although no green beer, soda and other sparkly drinks were lifted in lucky cheer. Cook-in favorites included hamburgers, hot dogs, onion rings, potato salad, baked beans, chocolate cake, and many headless coconut shrimp (still the most popular resident requested favorite that seems to be eaten quickly!) Lois Hogan, who recently celebrated her 101st birthday, visited virtually through Skype with her daughter, Beth Hogan. Thanks to the recreation therapy electronic tablets, Ms. Lois was able to chat during the cook-in and enjoy her meal. She was amazed to see her daughter across the miles in North Carolina. She said, “It’s amazing!” With Irish music playing in the background, the cook-in brought much luck and enjoyment for all.

Gennyosity

By Taylor Chamberlain | Volunteer Coordinator

A few weeks ago I was contacted by Col. John Ladner (RET) from the Keesler Air Force Jr. ROTC, Fine Arts and other clubs interested in giving back to residents. We spoke briefly about his idea, and when he delivered over 50 beautifully decorated boxes with various food items, sweet treats, note pads and more for upper levels of care. The artistic ability is just stunning.

When plans change

By Taylor Chamberlain | Volunteer Coordinator

Many of you know that my family was scheduled to relocate to Scott Air Force Base in Illinois. We’ve been stationed at Keesler Air Force Base since 2016, making this our longest assignment in my husband’s career thus far. We were informed last week that our assignment was canceled. Although we were looking forward to cooler temps (and cooler weather) I am excited to remain at AFRH-G a little while longer.
WASHINGTON

National Pig Day - popcorn, pork rinds & pig calling contest
By Carol Mitchell, ADC | Recreation Therapy
Photos by Steven Briefs | Recreation Supervisor & Marla McGuinness | Recreation Specialist

What a day! If you did not know it, March 1 was National Pig Day and what better way to celebrate than to have a pig-calling contest! It was a fun filled day with over 20+ participants including staff and residents from all levels of care. Thankfully, we only had minimal heckling but lots of laughter from socially distanced spectators.

Old “pig” memories came tumbling back to resident Submariner Warren Pospisil who proudly took off his shoes and socks to show off his pig & chicken foot tattoos. He then told the story of how he and his fellow shipmates operated out of Pearl Harbor and listened to a tale being spun by their ship’s chief. The chief told his crew that to keep alive they needed to have a pig tattooed on one foot and a chicken on the other… that this would keep them from drowning. Hence, Warren is still here today!

Following the event, resident pig calling judge Jim Hunnicutt felt the need to give a shout out to a fellow friend and submariner residing at AFRH-G, Ken Henry aka “Pig Pen” expressing that both Homes would benefit from celebrating National Pig Day:

“Dear Ken....
Attached is the flyer for the National Pig Calling Day Contest here at the Home. There were Pork Rinds & Popcorn, no beer or wine (which will be corrected in the future). Carol had movies from a state fair pig calling contest just to warm things up.
I didn’t call the pigs but was the official umpire and official judge. Pops didn’t call the pig either but was there as an avid supporter.
Steve, Recreation Director, didn’t call the pigs, but I gave him a 10 in a special category - Costume, he was dressed as a Pig Porker*. Everyone calling the pig scored an 8 for (categories I came up with): enthusiasm, loudness, animation, face expressions, embarrassment, or just plain heart. At Carol’s insistence that I pick a winner, finally gave one contestant an extra quarter point so that we had a pig caller head & shoulders above the rest.
This will become an annual event. You remember Ron Kartz, he is retiring and moving to his dad’s pig farm in Michigan. He promised to bring a porker here next year so that we can end the event with a pig roast.... Can’t believe that Gulfport let this extraordinary day celebrating your “expertise” pass into history without celebrating your fame. I think six lashes with a wet noodle is appropriate.
Give my best to all down south, can’t wait to get a little sand in my shoes.”

Congratulations to our 2021 pig-calling winner resident John Baker. Thanks to all who participated. Keep your eyes and vocal chords open and ready for next year’s challenge. Please see the AFRH Official Facebook page and website to view the event…. It is sure to put a smile on your face.

GULFPORT

The lost year
By Dan Ellis | AFRH-G Resident
Photos by Becki L. Zschiedrich | Public Affairs

When AFRH closed down its many amenities in Gulfport on March 9, 2020 due to the coronavirus, a significant number of residents protested verbally and even made appeals on TV. Some moved out to proclaimed greener pastures, and about thirty residents took temporary refuge with friends or family.

Those of us who stayed the course have seen 39 of our residents pass on to their “Happy Hunting Grounds,” while we have endured this pandemic with masks and the standard six-foot social distancing from one another.

We have been tested for COVID-19 about nine times during this period and 19 of us tested positive, so they too were placed in quarantine for two-week durations. Containment has been the rule by which we have passed each day. Even after AFRH partially reopened amenities in December, many of our residents have not yet stepped up to regain lost benefits. Attendance in the activity rooms is way below posted limits.

How long will close contact continue to be suspended? Friday night dancing, one of my favorite activities, will this be long in returning?
Statistically, the coronavirus has shown to be harder on older people: More than 80 percent of U.S. deaths have occurred among people who are 65 or older. For the last couple of years, the average age here in the Home has been 84, so in retrospect, caution has been a byword for the administrators. We have not liked some of the deterrents put in place, but after all is said and done, I, for one, prefer to have stayed the course here in the Home rather than in the outside world.

No matter what the situation is, you can always find Dan Ellis having a good time with a big smile on his face. Thank you Dan! All photos were taken pre-COVID-19.