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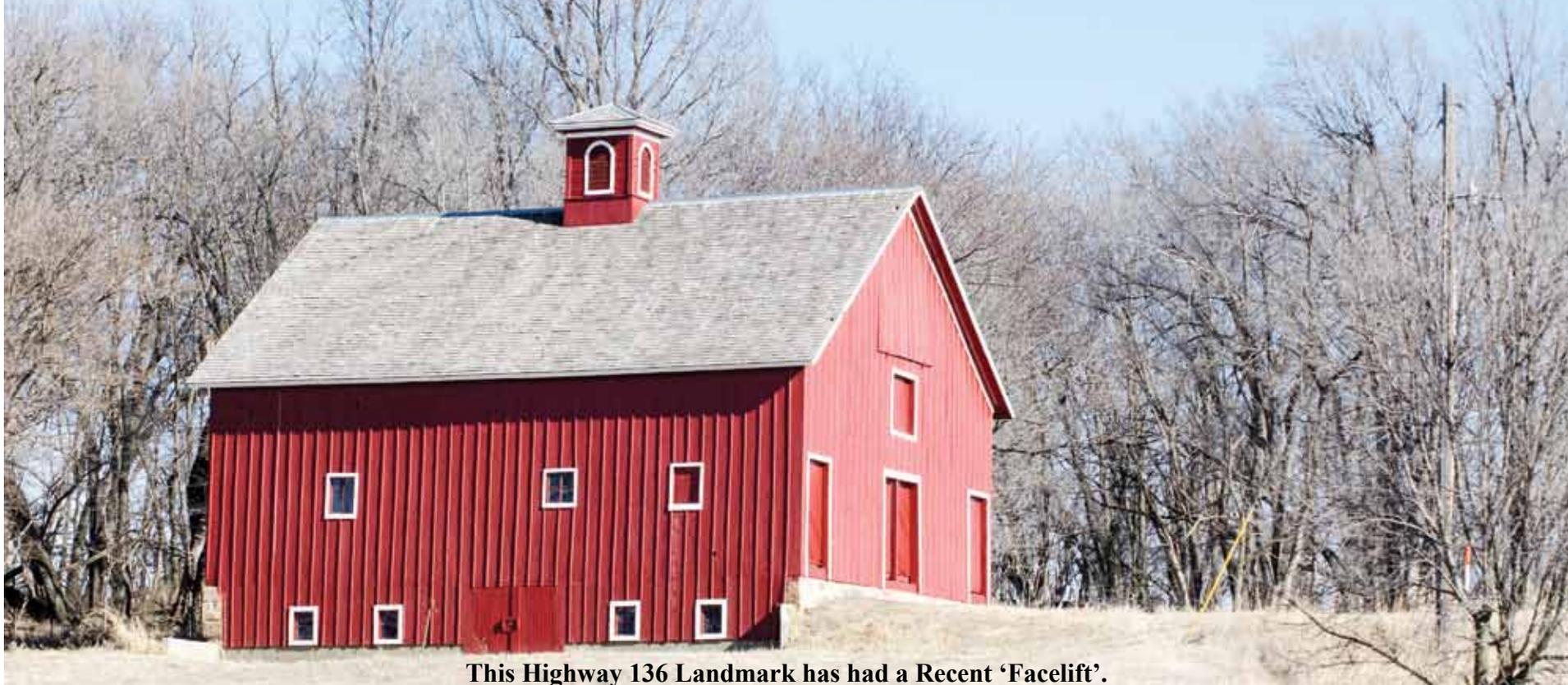
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Voices

From the Valleys of the Nemaha
Publisher & Photographer, Stephen Hassler

Writers This Month

Devon Adams
Carol Carpenter
Merri Johnson
Lee Nyberg
Marilyn Woerth

Thank You

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Where Life Is Good

Marilyn Woerth

Slow down and listen, close your eyes and take a deep breath, slow down and listen...can you hear it? The rhythmic thump, thump, thump of your heart... if you can hear your heart you have completed phase one of the "quiet game". This was one of my favorite games we played at my daycare/learning center in the 1990's.

I loved that place; it was a small blue house on a large corner lot. The munchkins called me Miss Marilyn and they were my "pumpkins". Little Shepherd Day Care was a magical place ran on imagination (no television), learning and love. We were outside as much as we possibly could be. Children behave so much better outside. The handbook warned parents "we will get dirty and be very active."

There was the Queen's Café where on the elaborate menu you would find roasted dragon tail and a strawberry tart for desert. Knights slew pawns and rooks and kings castled. Yarn snowballs were thrown followed by a wax paper ice skating party. The story board sprouted pigs, gingerbread men and stars made into constellations. And who could forget the invention box.

A beloved minister's granddaughter was our original wedding planner. The girls filled vases of plastic flowers, a preacher was chosen as well as the wedding party, the bride and groom were dressed to the hilt from the old wooden wardrobe, chairs assembled and songs were sung. And don't forget the birthday spanking machine, filled with giggles as you ran through and grew a year older.

The back yard was always busy, with tee ball and soccer games, digging for worms and crickets in the corner dirt pile, sandbox castles and busy highways, sliding down the slide into the wading pool. Our garden was planted with zinnias, plump sugar peas, round firm pumpkins and sunflowers that towered over Big Bear (always me), Little Fox, Brave Hunter, Smiling Moon, and all the others. Painting snow, going on hikes using the direction game (because Miss Marilyn was directionally challenged and she swore they wouldn't be), exploring the undersides of mushrooms with magnifying glasses, learning how to gamble playing dreidle, welcoming the Chinese New Year with a bow and "Gung Hoy Fat Choy", and learning to pick up macaroni with chop sticks, they loved it all. Standing straight and tall with their hands over their hearts, "I pledge..."

We took the whole month of October to make our own decorations for the center; hollow eve found "Dr. Blood" plucking out eyeballs (ping pong balls) for her eye ball stew and one of my pumpkin's tells his mother "Please come with me I know it's Miss Marilyn but she is scary tonight."

Snack time was learning measurements and fractions and how to break an egg and make cookies. Always learning. A mother's frantic call "How do you make those taco burgers? I am not doing it right." Cleaning Pebble's cage (the finch) and feeding Spike (the salamander) crickets or whatever the boys caught, were always top priorities.

I always worried about my pumpkins. Did I teach them enough, the basics, was it diverse enough, was it layered enough so they could add more? I wanted them to be citizens of the world; my hope, my plan. Did I achieve it? Sometimes a face comes up, "Miss Marilyn do you remember me?" I look hard to see the three, five, seven, nine year old child I once knew, and then excitedly "Oh is that your wee one with you?"

They are all my pumpkins and I still love them. My memories and photo albums of that special time and place help to reinforce what I already know. "Life Is Good". Happy Valentine's Day to everyone and to all your cherished pumpkins.



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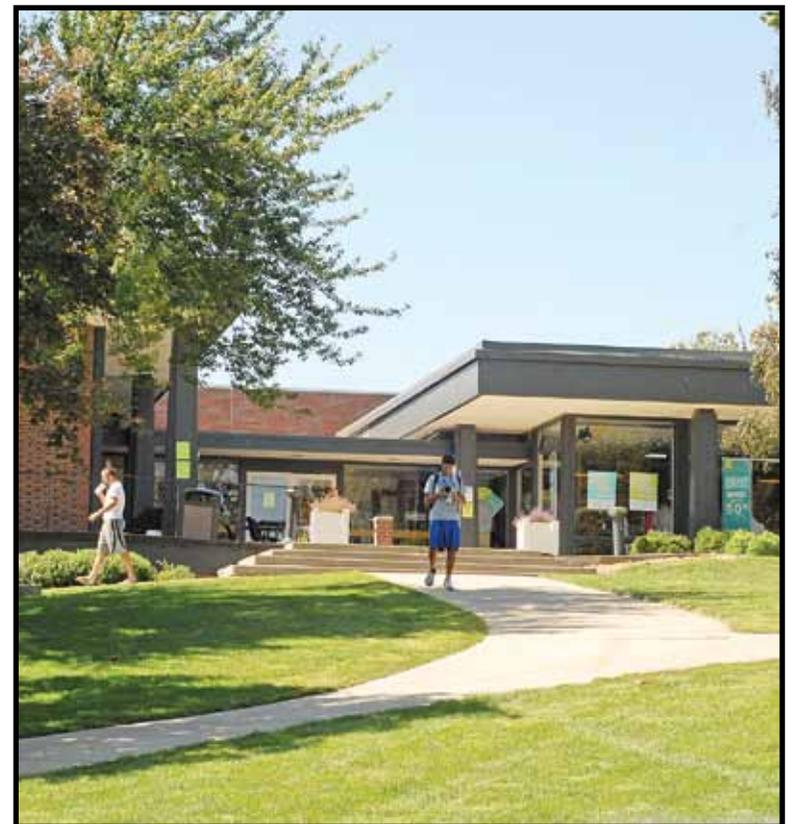
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STILL BEAUTIFUL

Dewy diamonds sparkle on the silky hairs of the rabbit's tail. The early sun of winter melts the velvet frost slowly, as the coyote trots across the field after a successful hunt. The rest of the bunny is in his stomach, but the tail is still beautiful.

LACE EDGES

Beside a small prairie river are groves of cottonwoods, reaching their long fingers toward the sky of winter. Their silhouettes form graceful crocheted fans, and like a lace border on a quilt, they are stitched to the edges of farmers' fields.

HIGH CRANES

The corridor is waiting to be filled with wings, and the songs of the souls who fly close to the edge of space. They come early in their hurry to go home to breeding grounds far north, and storms can take a toll, but bravery is woven into their cells, and beauty is a result of form following the function of being a wader and a flyer. They will come singing to those below in the raucous voices that sound like lost children wandering in a fog. "We are part of the whole of yesterday and tomorrow, following our ancient pattern, guided by instinct and experience. We are your past and your future, so pay attention, lest we all be lost."

SHADOWS WE CAN'T SEE

There are those among us who are gone, and have no form that can be seen. But they still have shadows that walk with them. Always with us, in light or dark, they have a presence that can be felt, if only we will be aware.

SWEEPING THE SKY

There is a janitor who is in charge of cleaning off the bright blue vault that turns to dark at night. He must work without cease, with no time to rest. When clouds pile into storms that tear the sky apart, and bomb the earth with spears of fire and bullets made of ice, or throw down blankets made of snow, or send frozen water coating things with glass, he must get out his broom and sweep until the blue comes back or the stars come out.

HEARTS AND FLOWERS

If you plant a seed, and wait and watch, and water and wonder when and if it will ever grow, you know how long it takes for good things to exist. Seeds have to hatch into roots and stems that reach above and below, until they become what it says on the package. If you try to rush the magic, the risk is high for failure. When you fall in love, and forget to wait for all the growing to be done, it never will be finished.

Diary of a Part-time Housewife

Merri Johnson

Hooray! It's January thaw time and Mother Nature is not letting us down. Why, it's warm enough to take down the Christmas lights and take outdoor walks, which is exactly what I've been doing while Hubby is off on a golf excursion to Arizona this weekend.

He called last evening to report having shot par on the toughest hole of the course he and his friend played yesterday, a 500-plus-yard par 5, I believe it was. You wouldn't think it would be big news to par a hole, given that "par" means "standard, average or norm." What's exciting about average? But hubby was quite pleased about it. His play the previous day had actually been "par" for him, which is to say he reported that he had "played well, but his score didn't show it." Oh well, a bad day on the golf course is better than a good day in the office, right?

For my part, I had a pleasant surprise while unwinding a string of lights from my Viburnum shrub: I found a lovely specimen of a cardinal's nest in the upper branches. My first thought was Why didn't I see that nest when I put the lights on the shrub? Then I remembered that I had had to clip the lights to the tips of the branches when I strung them shortly after Veterans' Day because the shrub was still in full leaf. I'm going to have to poke around in that shrub a few months from now to see if there's a new nest. Now, that's the kind of thing that excites me.

We're approaching Ground Hog Day, so spring cannot be far away, regardless of Punxsutawney Phil's prediction. If he sees his shadow on February 2 and goes back to hibernation for six more weeks, spring will still arrive on March 20. As pleasant as an early spring can be, it can also be devastating. It wasn't too many years ago that a glorious, prolonged, early spring ended in heartbreak and horrendous plant loss when a late-spring, hard freeze struck several nights in a row. Rushing the natural course of events typically doesn't work out well.

In the meantime, I still have winter projects that I had intended to have done or at least started before now. My garden spade is still awaiting a proper oiling, the shed needs to be swept and tidied up, the garage needs organizing, and I haven't gotten Hubby started on building new tomato supports yet. Those old, flimsy, mangled wire hoops and collapsible cages are beyond straightening. If I don't get Hubby going on that project soon, I'll be crawling around on my hands and knees harvesting this year's tomatoes off the ground.

Ah, well, there are bigger problems in the world than droopy tomato vines and a messy garden shed. I think I'll take my own advice and not rush into finishing those winter projects. It's still only January, after all.

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Alzheimer's Affects Us All



Making Hospital Stays Easier for Alzheimer's Patients

By Lee Nyberg

Since people with dementia often have weaker immune systems and compromised mobility, they are susceptible to infection and falls. Consequently, multiple hospital stays are likely over the course of the disease. A person with Alzheimer's is likely to experience worsened dementia symptoms due to the oddness of the hospital environment, with its noise levels, unfamiliar odors and lighting, strangers who come in and out of an "unfamiliar bedroom" and do painful things, such as insert intravenous needles.

Caregiving for your loved one with dementia is especially important during a hospital stay. A person with middle stage dementia, and beyond, cannot give reliable answers to questions from medical personnel; cannot be taught how to use a call button; and may not be able to communicate the presence of pain or advocate for himself in anyway. Additionally, the doctors and nurses treating him are not likely to have much training in dementia care, or even be aware of the presence of dementia.

The most important step families can take is to establish a rotation of caregivers to stay with the patient 24 hours a day, while in the hospital, and to have the primary caregiver present at the most difficult times of day for that patient. If necessary, have the doctor write an order for this constant caregiver attendance. Families who haven't used professional caregivers often call them in to share caregiving during hospital stays. The caregiver's job will be to communicate with doctors and nurses; keep track of doctor's orders, including tests and procedures; support the patient with eating, using the restroom, and bathing; and provide a soothing presence.

Since hospital personnel will change constantly, a one page information sheet on your loved one will be a vital communication piece. (You will have already provided a medication list and medical history.) It should include:

- Your loved one's preferred name
- That they have dementia
- Things that cause increased agitation
- How the person takes medication
- Typical behavior when in pain, thirsty, and hungry
- Preferred foods
- Whether s/he is incontinent

Ask that this information be included in the patient file and give a copy to each new nurse and doctor.

In addition to watching for pain, caregivers should also be alert to sudden extreme agitation or increased confusion. Hospital delirium (HD) is a condition of sudden and severe confusion, which is common in people 65 and older and can be brought on by fever, infection, or certain medications. Patients with dementia are highly susceptible to HD. Caregivers will be most familiar with the patient's typical behavior and should watch for heightened combativeness, more volatile emotions, hallucinations, and more disturbed sleep. If these dementia symptoms worsen suddenly, hospital staff should be notified.

The calming presence of caregivers who understand dementia and the unique condition of your loved one can make a tremendous difference in the level of anxiety and confusion he or she experiences in the hospital. Making the hospital room as personal as possible, with favorite pictures, a familiar blanket, and a preferred drink (if hospital staff permit), can also help soothe your loved one.

Lee Nyberg seeks to help families and those living with Alzheimer's through education and her company, Home Care Assistance. Please call 402-261-5158 to speak with a Care Manager or visit www.HomeCareAssistanceOmaha.com.

alzheimer's association®

ALZHEIMER'S ASSOCIATION PRESENTS DEMENTIA CARE CONFERENCE

Omaha, Nebraska— The Alzheimer's Association Nebraska Chapter will host a two-day dementia care conference on March 26 and March 27 at the Embassy Suites Hotel and Conference Center in La Vista. Presentations will cover information ranging from dementia care to innovative research to understanding behaviors commonly associated with dementia. Over 300 participants from across the state of Nebraska are expected at this year's conference.

On March 26, the conference presentations will focus on topics directed toward health care professionals and direct care staff, such as dementia care best practices. Presentations on March 27 are open to the general public and will include information about Alzheimer's research, new models of care and safety measures. Dr. Anna Burke, a board-certified geriatric psychiatrist and specialist in dementia care at Banner Alzheimer's Institute, will deliver a keynote presentation, and a virtual dementia tour will be available to help participants better understand the behaviors and needs of people living with dementia.

Conference details, including registration, sponsorship opportunities, area attractions and much more are now available at; www.alz.org/nebraska or by phone at 402.502.4301.



Canada Geese Photo by Jennifer Mumm of Falls City.



These Cardinal photos were taken after the first substantial snow of the season. Near my backyard bird feeder. Feb 1, 2015.



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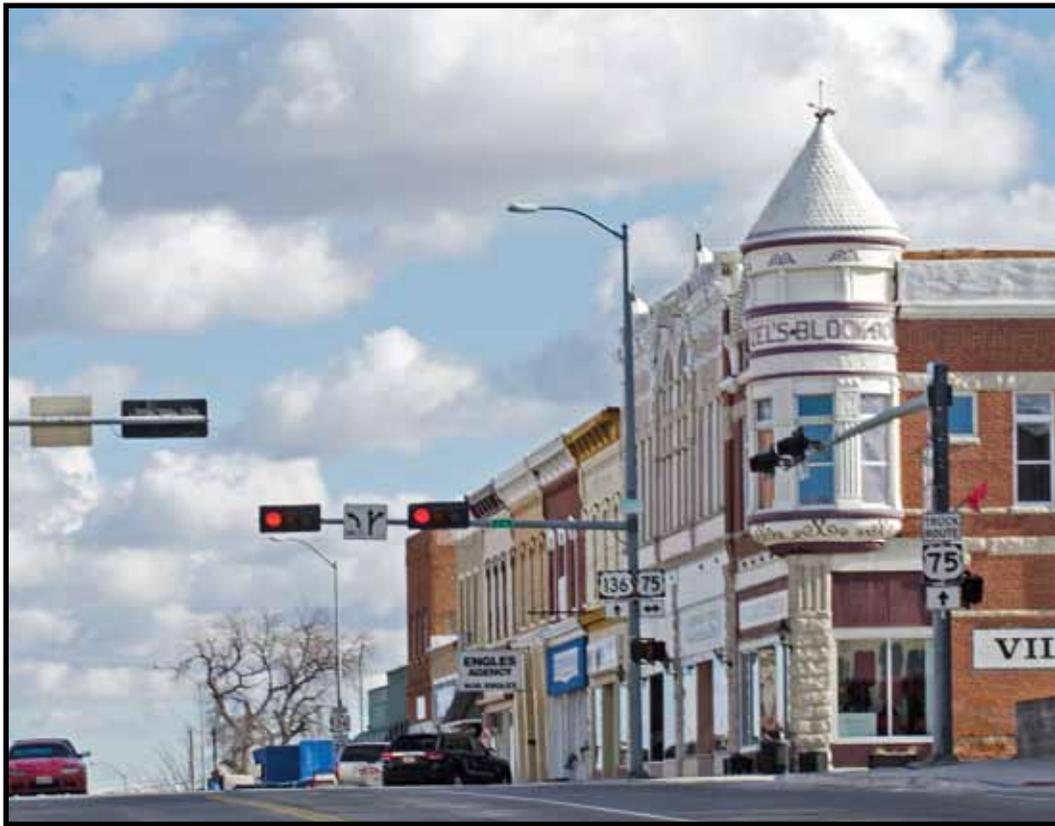
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Blondie and Bear Jams

Carol Carpenter

On the first morning in Glacier, we watched the sun rise over Swiftcurrent Lake. Crisp air threw tendrils of mist across the wrinkled surface. Mountaintops frosted with fresh snow blushed in the early morning light. After a light breakfast, Tom and I walked the 2.6-mile trail around the lake. Several times along the way, we dodged some rather large piles of bear scat right in the middle of the trail. Expecting to see bears while at the park, we realized that with all the other people on the trail, it wasn't very likely. Both of us wanted to see bears, especially grizzlies; however, without any bear spray (we were told to buy some there—none was available, go figure), close encounters were not on our “to do” list.

Day three we rode the Red Bus along the “Going to the Sun” road, spotting a female grizzly and her two cubs feeding along the mountainside about a ¼ mile from the road. We stopped briefly to take pictures. Day five on a return trip from Babb, we spotted a “bear jam,” cars on both sides of the road with a few stopped in the road in front of us. Initially, we couldn't see what everyone was looking at. Tom pulled over and said he'd go up on the hillside with binoculars and find the bear. As soon as he got out, a large blonde grizzly head popped up out of the ditch about eight feet in front of the car.

“It's right there,” I said. He quickly retreated behind the car.

We watched a 3-year-old female grizzly, the ranger informed us, for several minutes. My goodness, what a beautiful animal! Round ears, short nose, large hump on her shoulders, light fur glistening like gold in the sun. Several times, she stood up on her back legs and looked back at us, returning to eating berries. There were several people closer to the bear than we were, which I suppose gave us a false sense of security in the close proximity to a very large wild and carnivorous animal.

Our last morning with a long drive ahead of us, we left Many Glacier Lodge shortly after breakfast. On the road out, another bear jam along the road. Again, we couldn't see the bear. Tom pulled the car into the only opening. I started to open the door and spotted Blondie's very large head about six feet away. She, of course, was busy eating berries. Thought I was going to need some clean underwear, but I got back into the car and we pulled over to the other side of the road.

I stood with another woman behind her pick-up and took a few pictures of Blondie. Personally, I think I could have watched her all day. Another woman walked over to us and watched for a minute or two. She turned to us and said, “Do you want me go out into the field and draw out the bear?”

What?!?!? You have got to be kidding lady, I thought to myself. This isn't a movie or a reality show. Then I looked into her eyes (her blank vacant stare) and realized that the porch light was on, but nobody was at home. My smart aleck kicked in right then and there.

I turned and said, “Let me go and get the huckleberry jam out of the trunk of my car and we'll smear that all over your arm first.”

She gave me a blank stare. I probably wouldn't have done it, but I did seriously think about it. A bear can only eat one person at a time, right?





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ALZHEIMER'S ASSOCIATION PRESENTS
DEMENTIA CARE CONFERENCE

Omaha, Nebraska

The Alzheimer's Association Nebraska Chapter will host a two-day dementia care conference on March 26 and March 27 at the Embassy Suites Hotel and Conference Center in La Vista. Presentations will cover information ranging from dementia care to innovative research to understanding behaviors commonly associated with dementia.

Conference attendees will have the opportunity to learn about Alzheimer's research, models of care, safety measures, and behaviors commonly associated with dementia.

See page 8 of this publication
for more details.

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Nebraska City, NE 68410

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