Greetings from Mike

You made healthful rest available to all 40 of our residents. That was no small task. Thank You!!! If I had space to write Thank You forty times, I would do so. Each elder at the Center is truly grateful for their new beds we received this spring.

In one of my letters, I wrote about what Edna Seminole said to me concerning her bed. Edna has lived with us for nearly 15 years now. She was the second elder to make Heritage Living Center her home in 2002. While we were chatting, Edna paused and spoke, “Mike, my bed hurts.” She carefully touched her hip and continued, “I have bad arthritis and it hurts in my lumpy bed. The beds here are not good.” I knew we had to do something about the old beds at the Center.

Donors from around the country heard my plea and sent donations to purchase new mattresses for the elders. I must admit though, I didn’t realize how difficult it would be to purchase that many mattresses and have them delivered to our remote location.

US Highway 212 runs through the heart of our tiny town of Ashland, Montana. It is a truck route with hundreds of 18-wheelers passing through each day. So many trucks use US 212 that it is a dangerous stretch of road through both the Northern Cheyenne Indian Reservation and the Crow Indian Reservation. You would think that mattresses could be loaded onto a truck and then delivered upon arrival to Ashland. We learned it doesn’t work that way. The mattresses were a long time coming.

Mike Skaggs readies new mattresses to be delivered to the elders’ apartments.
I must tell you about our exciting summer filled with earthquakes and fires. In early July, an earthquake struck in the mountain town of Lincoln, Montana, several hundred miles from here. The shock of the quake was felt far into southeast Canada and north in Montana. It was an odd feeling as the heavy sleepers in their new beds didn’t feel it. Thankfully, we suffered no damage. Thankfully, we suffered no damage. The region quickly dried up to create dangerous fire conditions.

Spring and early summer started out normal in June and July spiking temperatures in the high 90s and over 100 degrees. The summer filled with earthquakes and fires. In early July, an earthquake struck the elders' home. It is a few miles south of Lincoln, Montana, several hundred miles from here. The shock of the quake was felt far into southeast Canada and north in Montana. It was an odd feeling as the heavy sleepers in their new beds didn’t feel it. Thankfully, we suffered no damage. Thankfully, we suffered no damage.

The hot weather generates big storms and when lightning strikes a fire can explode. Even a horse trailer hitch safety chain dragging on a gravel road can spark a grass fire.

I hope you enjoy reading our summer edition of “Signals.” Please remember the elders as you share your prayers and support. With a grateful heart,

Mike Skaggs

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With a grateful heart,

Mike Skaggs

Please pray for the elders’ safety, our vigilant staff and the protection of the “Miracle on the Hill” during our fire season.

Thank you for coming to our aid to upgrade our fire sprinkler system. Gifts are coming in to help us pay the unexpected cost to bring our system up to new safety standards. Parts and supplies are arriving and repairs are scheduled for early August. Inside this newsletter, you will find a photo of the Center’s administrator, Jerry Thex, sitting in front of the complex system of pumps, valves and expansion tanks that make the fire sprinklers work. We hope this system is never needed but we’re glad we will have it updated soon.

You will also find on the next page a very interesting article about one of our newest residents, Pauline Eaglefeathers and her family history. Pauline’s mother, Rose, was a resident of Heritage Living Center before my time. Father Emmett told me stories about Rose and how she incessantly teased him. Father would tease back at her knowing she was living some of the best years of her life at the Center. He knew she was happy with her new home and nutritious meals each day.

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Indian history was not a part of the curriculum back then.

Being a direct descendant of Dull Knife (lore has it the nickname was bestowed by hunting mates who observed an event where he had a persistent struggle skinning an animal) is not something to say much about publicly, which attracts special attention on the reservation. The thing is, everyone is related to someone who is revered in tribal history; no one is left out when it comes to being related to someone very important, someone who did big things long ago. All Cheyennes get to take pride in their history and heritage. The reverence for Dull Knife though is unmatched.

Chief Dull Knife College is located in Lame Deer, the high school sports teams are the Morning Stars, and the Northern Cheyenne tribe calls itself The Morning Star People.

Pauline's brother Clifford Eaglefeathers came to HLC for a visit at the end of June. A Northern Cheyenne ceremonial man, Clifford was asked to perform a cloth blessing for the residents at HLC. They gathered in the front commons and listened intently to the man with the soft but clear voice. “You have everything here (for your spirituality.) The plants, the rocks, the earth paints. Cheyennes are known everywhere, people want to be Cheyenne, but not everyone can be Cheyenne. Practice the Cheyenne ways. Pray for the little ones, pray for the future. Let’s help each other. If someone needs help, help them.”

One by one, Clifford blessed the residents and staff as he moved prayer cloths aerated with cedar smoke over and around them.

Clifford wanted everyone to know where he lives - in a small town of 600 in New York state - where the right kind of rocks needed for the sweat lodge do not exist. Nor does sweetgrass, or sage, or good cedar. “It’s all right here!” he reminded everyone out loud, and seemingly himself, once again.

Last year Pauline was one of many Cheyennes who journeyed to Fort Robinson, Nebraska, for the dedication of a Cheyenne memorial recognizing their relatives in the famous Fort Robinson Breakout. It was a special moment in her life because her mother, Rose Eaglefeathers, was one of two women who started the whole project 15 years ago. Rose lived at the Heritage Center along with Edna Seminole and the two worked together fundraising, designing and building the memorial piece by huge piece. They traveled back and forth together to the site for more than a decade. Rose passed in 2014, leaving Edna to finish their vision. The dedication of the spectacular monument was featured in this newsletter, and prominently in many newspapers including The Billings Gazette. Edna and her family were there basking in the joy of the moment. And Edna, who was in the very first “class” to move into HLC, recently celebrated her 90th birthday here!

“I’m very proud of what my mom did, I’m so glad that memorial is there,” Pauline said of Rose. “It was a great day.” She holds a photo showing Rose, Pauline, Pauline’s daughter, and her daughter’s daughter. “Four generations,” she says. Then she pulled out some older photos of Dull Knife and the family that came before her; Dull Knife, his daughter, then her daughter, and Rose (seated below left).

Below Right: Rose Eaglefeathers (right) and Edna Seminole (left) standing at the Fort Robinson barracks where their relatives and many other Northern Cheyenne relatives were held prisoner.

Right: 2016, Northern Cheyenne journeyed to Crawford, Nebraska for the dedication of a memorial that honors the relatives involved in the Fort Robinson Breakout, 1879.
A TRIBUTE TO CONNIE SUMP

Conrad “Connie” Sump and Father Emmett Hoffmann were best friends. They were more like brothers than friends. They toiled together in the hard work God put before them. One a Catholic priest. The other a Lutheran layman – an accountant by profession.

Father and Connie met in the 1960s and over the years they helped the Cheyenne people change life on their small reservation in southeast Montana. Schools, homes, churches and factories were built. Most significantly, the Heritage Living Center became a home for elders who needed a safe place to live with nutritious meals and assisted-living care.

Connie Sump peacefully passed away on April 4. A small delegation from Heritage Living Center represented the elders at his funeral service bringing their prayers, a traditional woolen blanket and beaded cross to honor and pay respect to a man who helped them for 50 years.

Goodbye Connie. Rest in your eternal rewards. May you and Father Emmett keep an eye on us and direct Heaven’s blessing our way.

CRAFT SALE

The Center elders held a craft sale to raise funds for activities and trips they enjoy throughout the year. Handcrafts, handmade clothing, beadwork, and art were just some of the items for sale to bargain hunters. Funds collected go to a special fund earmarked for trips to sacred sites such as Bear Butte in South Dakota, ceremonial sites and hot springs with medicinal qualities.

JERRY’S WORLD

Above: Jerry Thex is Heritage Living Center’s Administrator and mechanical wizard. He and the maintenance team keep the Center humming including the fire sprinkler system pictured behind him.

Left: The small leak in a fire sprinkler head led to a major sprinkler system upgrade costing over $18,000. Work is progressing. Thank you for your generous gifts.
In June, Heritage Living Center’s elders rode the center’s minibus 125 miles to the Western Heritage Center, Billings, MT to view a traveling exhibition, Coming Home: The Northern Cheyenne Odyssey.

The exhibit displayed murals of old Cheyenne photos and quotes chosen to emphasize difficulties the tribe experienced. Artifacts like buffalo hide coats and beaded clothing depicted the Plains Indian culture. A videotaped interview of a Cheyenne historian describing episodes in Cheyenne history handed down through oral traditions attracted anyone with the time to sit in a small theatre and listen.

Individual Retirement Accounts, better known as IRAs. Sometimes they saved directly to an IRA planning for their retirement future. Other times, when someone changed jobs, they rolled over their 401(k), 403(b) and other qualified plans sponsored by their employer into an IRA.

Over time, those retirement savings grew to a comfortable nest egg. However, at age 70½, the federal law says it’s time to start recognizing some of those tax-advantaged savings and paying taxes on each annual distribution. Even after taking a distribution, some retirees saw their savings grow due to the investments they had made.

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Years ago, Congress encouraged charitable giving from those tax-advantaged savings and paying taxes on each annual distribution. Even after taking a distribution, some retirees saw their savings grow due to the investments they had made.

Now, you can plan for gifts from your IRA with confidence. It isn’t too early to start planning your charitable gifts for the causes important to you. We hope Soaring Eagle is one of your favorite charities and if you choose to give from your IRA, you will consider us and the Heritage Living Center elders we care for as recipients of your generosity.

In December 2015, Congress passed the Protecting Americans from Tax Hikes Act. Known as the PATH Act, the law allows Qualified Charitable Distributions (QCD) from IRAs and is now a permanent law. Donors can now plan how and when they give from their tax-free retirement savings.

One strategy is to take distributions from non-IRA accounts for living expenses after taxes are paid and make direct transfers to charity from an IRA account. You will want to check with your financial advisor to determine the best way and time to transfer retirement funds to meet your charitable goals.

The requirements get a little complicated but here are the basic rules for Qualified Charitable Distributions:

1. Funds must be transferred directly from the IRA to Soaring Eagle. Please don’t take the distribution and then make your donation. You’ll have to pay taxes on the income first if you do. The distribution must come straight to Soaring Eagle.
Continued from page 9

Effective Giving

Many of our friends are blessed with plentiful resources to provide for themselves, loved ones, and the charities important to them. Choosing what to give, when to give, and how to give can be rewarding once it is completed, so don’t put it off. Year’s end will be here before we know it and time may be too short to put good plans in place if you wait.

To help you learn more, we have prepared a booklet entitled “Giving Through Retirement Plans” that we would be pleased to send to you. Please contact Mike Skaggs, CEO, Soaring Eagle, P.O. Box 879, Billings, MT 59103 or call 406-256-8500.

The information in this newsletter is presented to Soaring Eagle’s donors and friends to provide general information and encourage charitable giving. Soaring Eagle is a public charity incorporated in the state of Montana and does not engage in rendering legal, tax, financial, or any other professional advice. Consult your own professional advisor as it pertains to your individual financial circumstances, tax codes, and applicable federal discount rates, which vary based on numerous factors including personal financial circumstances, tax codes, and applicable federal discount rates, which can change each month. Charitable gift annuities may not be available in all states.

The above are sample forms only. Consult your attorney when preparing any legal document.

To learn more about the benefits of a Soaring Eagle gift annuity, please use the coupon in this newsletter or call Mike Skaggs at 406-256-8500, Soaring Eagle, P.O. Box 879, Billings, MT 59103.

A Final Thought

One of life’s fears is living longer than your money. It is one of those worries nearly everyone has no matter how much or little you have saved.

Sometimes though, a good donor will pass away leaving funds in their IRA and other retirement accounts. Naming Soaring Eagle as a beneficiary of a retirement account might be a tax-wise way to give at the end of life and preserve other meaningful assets to pass along to family and friends.

Naming Soaring Eagle as a beneficiary is usually a simple matter and can be accomplished by asking your advisor for a beneficiary designation form for your account. Be sure to consider the impact of your decision on your other estate plan gifts to others. For some, it is a smart and easy way to include a charitable dimension in their end of life plans.

Keep in mind that the assets are there for you to use during life no matter what expenses or desires you have to spend your savings on. They are only transferred at death when you no longer need the asset.

The above are sample forms only. Consult your attorney when preparing any legal document.
The elders tell me that when birds start eating berries the first week of August, it’s surely a sign of an early winter. But we’ve had a good year for berries and the Cheyenne elders can’t wait for a taste of chokecherry pudding.

During my 54 years in Montana, I’ve heard many stories from the elders about how hard it was in the 1930s, when wild game was scarce on the reservation. They dried berries and wild turnips for winter use in order to survive. Rather than die from slow starvation, they ate prairie dogs and muskrats.

It broke my heart to see desperation and hunger still tightening its grip on these good people. As they suffered in silence, I refused to stand by and do nothing! I still can’t accept that in America, we have people who are hungry. I made up my mind that these Cheyenne children of the 1930s who are now old and living at the Heritage Living Center will never be hungry again.

A good friend and fellow Chief of the Council of 44, Jim Medicine Bird, helped his aged mother by shaking the trees and picking the plums off the ground. Jim and his mother, Mae, could be seen walking home, each struggling to carry two old lard buckets full of plums and berries.

Jim’s grandfather was Ma’om or “Ice,” a celebrated storyteller and one of the last of the great medicine men of his tribe. Ma’om fought in the Battle of the Little Bighorn and was known for his healing ceremonies. His grandson Jim grew up listening to the elders and he memorized their old Cheyenne stories and songs. Jim’s dad passed away in 1949. From then on, Jim lovingly cared for his mother’s every need. But one day, he walked to town for a few groceries and when he returned, he found his mother on the floor. She had fallen and broken her hip. When she died not long afterward, Jim blamed himself for not being at home when she fell. He spoke about the changing times:

When I was young, those old people had pep. They walked everywhere. They picked berries and shared their food. When they died, we were with them and we buried them in the rim rocks in the old way. But now, old age gets to them quicker and they get sent away to nursing homes. They shouldn’t send those old people away from where they were born and raised and where their relatives live. All the old people we relied on for advice are too far away.

The Lord continues to call upon me to feed the poor. Healthy elders live longer, productive lives and that is my main goal. Your donations will “keep the miracle alive” on the hill above Ashland.

Your beggar friend,
Father Emmett
SOARING EAGLE GIFT INFORMATION REQUEST

Name_______________________________________________________________________
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Email (Promise we will not share) ________________________________________________

YES, I'm interested in a Soaring Eagle Charitable Gift Annuity. Please send me more information.
Birth date(s) of annuitant(s) _________________________       _________________________________

Annuity Amount $ ___________
Minimum annuity amount $5,000 (up to 2 names/birth dates allowed per annuity.)

This is a non-binding proposal. Upon receipt of actual payment for an annuity, a formal contract will be mailed. For more information call (406) 256-8500.

Please send to me the following:

___ Giving Securities     ___ Giving Through Retirement Plans    ___ Giving Through Your Will

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Father Emmett's remarkable story of success is unequalled in the history of the 20th century Catholic Church in the American West.

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