

One man's journey to a successful place in his life

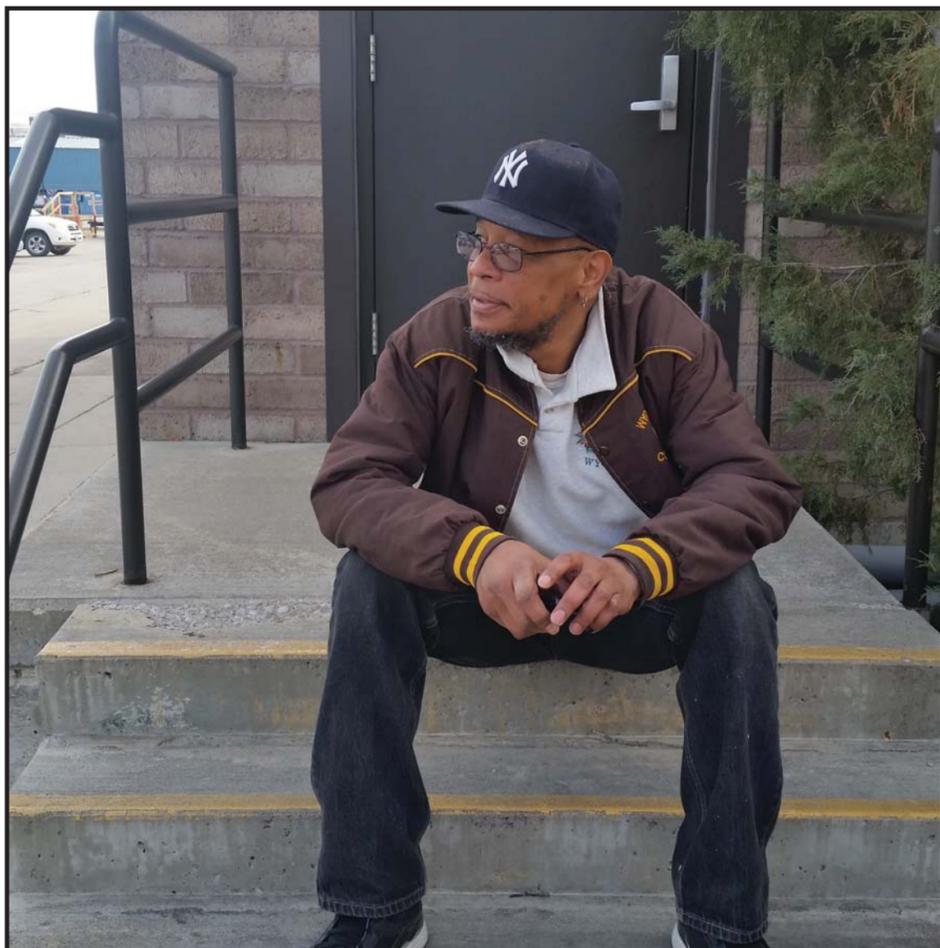
BY LOIS BELL
SHERIDAN SENIOR CENTER

SHERIDAN — Greg Blakely is feeling like a success. A Navy veteran, Blakely has experienced tough times, really tough times, since service. But with grit and perseverance — and help — Blakely feels that his life is now in a good place.

"I've seen a big growth in him," Gwen Burgess said. "I've seen him go from down here to way up."

Burgess works with veterans such as Blakely in the Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing program. VASH works to build effective community partnerships to help veterans experiencing chronic homelessness. Blakely was one of those veterans.

Blakely left home at 17



COURTESY PHOTO

Navy veteran Greg Blakely said recently that he feels like he's landed in a good place in life. Blakely has worked his way from homelessness through Department of Veterans Affairs services and a partnership with the Sheridan Senior Center.

and went to New York City where he enlisted.

"I wanted to be a photographer's mate but I was told the program was closed so instead I was a boatswain's mate," he said.

After service, Blakely kicked around California before heading back to New York City by Greyhound bus. Blakely took photographs with friends and paid for a photography class, then began working in retail with J.W. Mays and Saks Fifth Avenue. Later he worked at a hotel.

"I enjoy working with people," Blakely said.

Blakely left New York City for Atlanta, Georgia. He worked temporary jobs in American Express customer service and washing cars for an automobile dealer. He "kicked around" before moving to Virginia.

Blakely's life became bumpy. He lived with his mother-in-law, then with a sister in Denver. He worked temp jobs and drove buses. He bunked in a shelter from time-to-time.

"I met a girl, hooked up, then got in trouble," Blakely said.

Life went into a downward spiral for Blakely, who said he was in a cycle of prison and suicide attempts. He landed one night in Denver General Hospital.

"They discharged me in the middle of the night," he said. He took a bus back to the Denver Veterans Affairs center. As a veteran, he was receiving psychiatric counseling through the VA.

"I was seeing a psychiatrist once a month for about an hour," Blakely said.

The staff recommended that Blakely come to the psychiatric hospital at the Sheridan VA.

"It was Sept. 19, 2009," Blakely said. "They flew me here."

Blakely spent eight months in the VA psychiatric ward. The head of the department stepped in and assigned

him a psychiatrist. Blakely was now in sessions twice a week.

"I needed to talk things out and learn to forgive people who done me wrong," Blakely said.

Blakely landed a job through the VA Compensated Work Therapy program. During his stay, a VA staff person told Blakely about the VASH program. Blakely was in. He moved in with a friend and began saving money for a down payment and first month's rent. His roommate moved to Buffalo and Blakely found a place he could call his own.

Through the VASH program, Blakely met Burgess. Burgess is on staff at the Sheridan Senior Center. The center partners with the VA to support veterans with programs such as VASH.

"She (Burgess) didn't like the place I was going to go to and found another place for me," Blakely said. "It's perfect, close to my hang out spots."

It has now been six years.

Blakely attends mandatory monthly VASH meetings with VA coordinators Jennifer Fairbank and Curt Merriam, Burgess, and with other veterans in the program. The meetings give veterans in the VASH program an opportunity to check in on their progress.

"Sometime we go fishing," Blakely said.

Burgess said she expects Blakely will graduate from VASH. According to Burgess, veterans graduate when the program coordinators think they are ready to stand on their own.

Today, Blakely uses his retail experience and enjoyment working with people at the Senior Center's Green Boomerang Thrift Shop. He works at the store four days a week through a paid work program.

"I'd like to think that I'm a success," Blakely said.

Tackle prediabetes with a healthy nutritional plan

When my mom was diagnosed with Type 2 diabetes mellitus, I knew immediately that our family's lives had changed forever. Before such a diagnosis, most individuals develop "prediabetes," a condition involving factors such as age, gender, family history, personal health status, lifestyle or a combination of these elements.

My mom had likely lived with prediabetes for years without any of us realizing that her changing medical situations, family background and personal lifestyle choices were exacerbating her health. As her children, we siblings instantly became "high risk" for developing prediabetes, too. When my mom started dialysis treatments, we learned a valuable lesson about commitment and self-care.

"Prediabetes means a person's blood glucose (sugar) level is higher than normal, but not high enough yet to be diagnosed with type 2 diabetes. People with prediabetes are on the road to develop type 2 diabetes and are also at increased risk for serious health problems such as stroke and heart disease," (www.diabetes.org).

Amazingly, one in three American adults are prediabetic, although nearly 90 percent do not realize it. Minimal symptoms occur, yet a simple blood test is optimal for confirming prediabetes. However, our individual anatomical and physiological make-ups are distinctively complex. So, what self-care strategies can we utilize to either postpone or hopefully avoid developing this serious, progressively debilitating disease of diabetes?

Age, gender and family history are genetic influences that we cannot change. Conversely, choosing to increase physical activity level, lose weight as needed and embracing healthier nutritional habits can all increase our chances of defeating this disturbing challenge to our health. Nutritional awareness — stepping up-to-the-plate — is just one "ingredient" of confronting prediabetes head-on, but my siblings and I agree it is an essential part.

No doubt you have heard this before: "You are what you eat!" This statement, which originated in the 1860s, simply implies that what we eat and drink are of utmost significance to our overall health and wellbeing. Since little evidence clearly points to supplementation as a means of satisfactorily fulfilling nutrient requirements, one of our greatest allies in staying healthier as we age is committing to a daily balanced, nutritional combination of food and drink. Of course, some people have specific dietary needs, which must be honored when establishing an overall grouping of options. Being organized and staying hopeful along your journey creates a win-win situation. Choose a proactive path with meals that include the freshest ingredients possible, allowing yourself to enjoy each day more, fueled with energy and peace of mind.

Among the websites you can visit to find more information that have terrific recipes include the American Diabetes Association (www.diabetes.org) and Mayo Clinic (www.mayoclinic.org). Locally, our Sheridan Senior Center offers nutritious, inexpensive lunches all week long, both at the center and through the "Meals-on-Wheels" program. Breakfasts are available too, and all menus are created with the assistance of a registered dietitian. What a perfect way to support the pursuit for better nutritional habits. Check out the website at www.sheridan-seniorcenter.org, call 672-2240 or drop by 211 Smith St. to find out more details about meal options.

Tackling prediabetes with a healthy nutritional plan may be easier than you think — try it! You'll love the way you feel and enjoy empowering yourself to choose a healthier lifestyle. Trust me. Just do it!

GUEST COLUMNIST TERESA (TEDDY) E. ARAAS, PhD, CHES, E-RYT500, CYT700, RPYT, owns local businesses Balanced Living Health & Wellbeing Consultants, LLC and Santosha Yoga. She also teaches doctoral courses in health promotion and wellness and holds an adjunct research fellowship at Rocky Mountain University of Health Professions, Provo, Utah. Email her at: theyogaqueen@gmail.com. Center Stage is written by friends of the Senior Center for the Sheridan Community. It is a collection of insights and stories related to living well at every age.



TEDDY ARAAS

The Sheridan Senior Center:
Food, Fun, and Friendship!

Sheridan Senior Center
"Celebrating 40 Years of Service!"
www.sheridanseniorcenter.org

Fun and Food
BUILD YOUR OWN SALAD Mondays - Fridays
Entrees and kiosk include sides, dessert and drink.

Entrée Choice*	or	Soup Kiosk
Tue, Mar 21 - Fish Florentine		Ham, Cheese, & Broccoli Soup
Wed, Mar 22 - Lasagna		Tasty Reuben Soup
Thu, Mar 23 - Turkey Filet		Creamy Beef Noodle Soup
Fri, Mar 24 - Taco Salad		Lentil Butternut Bisque
Sat, Mar 25 - Chicken Enchilada		No soup kiosk on Sat
Sun, Mar 26 - Pork Chop Supreme		No soup kiosk on Sun
Mon, Mar 27 - Hawaiian Chicken Breast		Check out our Monday soup!

*entrée only offered for Home Delivered Meals

March is National Nutrition Month: "Put Your Best Fork Forward!"

Tue, Mar. 21 - Tai Chi	8:30 a.m.	Community Room
Wed, Mar. 22 - B.A.M! Class	9:30 a.m.	Community Room
Thu, Mar. 23 - Snap, Crackle, Pop! Yoga	5:30 p.m.	Community Room
Fri, Mar. 24 - B.A.M! Class	9:30 a.m.	Community Room
Sat, Mar. 25 - Double Deck Pinochle	12:30 p.m.	Community or Dining Room

Lunch Service Hours: 11:30 a.m. to 12:45 p.m., 365 days a year at 211 Smith Street
Building hours: 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Mondays - Fridays
9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. Weekends and Holidays
211 Smith Street Sheridan, WY 82801
Home Delivered Meals (307) 672-6079
Senior Center Main Phone: (307) 672-2240 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Mon - Fri

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SENIOR HAPPENINGS

- Community pint night — Join friends of the Sheridan Senior Center on Tuesday at 5 p.m. at the Black Tooth Brewing Company located at 312 Broadway St. in Sheridan. \$1 from every beer sold will go to the Senior Center to support services to senior residents. Music, awesome raffle packages and great beer will be featured. No need to sign up ahead — just come on in!

- The seventh annual Keystone Awards will take place April 20. This is a fundraiser to support services from the Senior Center in supporting

older residents living independently in the community. Live entertainment, food, friends and fun will be included. Honor people who have shaped the community. Tickets are on sale at the WYO Theater, 42 N. Main St., or online at www.wyothrater.com.

- A trip to the Mountain Meadow Wool Mill in Buffalo will take place March 28. Lunch and transportation is included in the trip fee. The suggested contribution for individuals registered with the Senior Center is \$20. The cost for nonregistered travelers is \$24. Payment reserves your spot. Stop by

the Senior Center receptionist station from 9 a.m. to 3:45 p.m. Monday through Friday at 211 Smith St. to pay and sign up. You may reserve your spot with a credit or debit card by calling 672-2240. The deadline to pay and sign up is March 23.

- A trip to Glacier National Park with the Senior Center is planned for Sept. 9-13, but sign up is required by May 1. Interested in more information or signing up? Call Peg Martin at Britain World Travel for details, 672-2481. Brittain World Travel is coordinating this trip for the Senior Center.