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Wichitan spells way to national competition

By B.D. Tharp

You might call it serendipity that Mary Ann Fenske is representing Kansas in the National Senior Spelling Bee this month in Cheyenne, Wyo. It was in August 2009 that Mary Ann spotted a brochure at the Orchard Park Bridge Center about the Second Annual Greater Wichita Senior Spelling Bee and since, “It sounded neat, I went to the East Wichita Shepherd’s Center and signed up.”

The bee began with a written test of 50 words and the fifteen highest scoring contestants were chosen for the oral spelldown. The first “bee” words were fairly easy, but became more difficult as the bee progressed.

The spelling bee was judged by employees of The Wichita Eagle and Wichita State University with a local radio personality presenting the words to contestants.

“I was one of three spellers invited to compete at the state competition in October,” said Fenske.

The retired college instructor said it had been years since she was in a spelling bee. “I remember being in a classroom spelling bee (back in) fifth grade.” But this was her first time to compete as an adult.

The state competition was held October 16 in Salina with 39 participants between the ages of 50 and 90. Mary Ann Fenske won first place. “I was so pleasantly surprised to be competitive in Wichita—and over the moon to win state. I didn’t expect it,” she said.

“One of the women at state was called Spellin’ Helen,”

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Mary Ann Fenske, left, holds the ceramic award she received as winner of the 2009 Kansas Senior Spelling Bee. Also pictured is Mary Jo Bond, a winner in the Greater Wichita Area Senior Spelling Bee who also competed in the state contest.

Contributed photo



Seniors to see benefits from health care legislation this summer

By Amy Geiszler-Jones

America’s new health care reform legislation is set to make some early “deliveries” of benefits that particularly affect seniors starting this summer, according to government officials.

Two of those benefits are changes to the Medicare prescription drug “doughnut hole” gap in coverage and to a “reinsurance” program by employers for early retirees, according to speeches and Web chats by former Kansas governor Kathleen Sebelius, who is overseeing the implementation of health care reform as U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services.

“Starting on June 15, seniors who have hit the prescription drug doughnut hole will get a \$250 rebate check to help them afford their medicines this year,” Sebelius said in comments at the National Press Club in April.

In a recent Web chat, Sebelius, along with U.S. Commerce Secretary Gary Locke, explained how employers — who provide insurance to more than 180 million Americans — will have an incentive to continue or even to start providing insurance for early retirees. The government’s reinsurance program will go into effect this June, as well.

“We’ll also be working with doctors across the country to turn Medicare into a quality-driven, high-value health care purchaser,” Sebelius said.

“When seniors walk into a hospital and doctor’s office, they should get the best care possible each and every time and as the world’s largest insurance program, Medicare has a lot of clout. It leads by example. History has shown that if Medicare can find smarter ways to pay for care, other insurers will copy them and we’ll all get better results.”

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 125 S West St., Suite 105
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Where do I call?

Do you have questions about services available for older people? Call the information and referral number for the Department on Aging in your county for assistance.

Wichita 660-5120

Sedgwick County outside of Wichita phone exchanges toll-free 1-800-367-7298

Harvey County..... 284-6880 or toll free 1-800-750-7993

Butler County 775-0500 or toll free 1-800-279-3655

Also, look for information on programs and services on the web at www.cpaaa.org

Senior spellers preparing for national, local bees

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Fenske said. "She's 86 years old. She had fans who rang cowbells and held up placards in support of her. She was wonderful," Fenske recalled.

"The bee is a tremendous experience. It's good motivation for people getting into the senior part of their life, to keep their mind sharp and memory functioning," Fenske said. "It is also a great way to make friends." Mary Ann met Mary Jo Bond, another

speller from the Wichita bee who qualified for the Kansas state competition.

Mary Jo competed in the Wichita Bee in 2008 and 2009 and plans to again this year on August 10.

Mary Ann said that last year, right before the competition, Mary Jo was diagnosed with cancer. She was so focused on the contest, that Mary Jo scheduled her surgery following the Wichita bee. "Mary Ann and I were among the top three winners

of the Wichita bee," Mary Jo said. "The doctor and nurse recognized me from the picture in the Eagle," Bond said. "I was still feeling the buzz of the bee!"

"She's one tough cookie," said Fenske, "and, she is helping me study for the national bee."

As first-prize winner of the Kansas State Spelling Bee, Fenske received a \$1,500 scholarship to participate in the national contest in Cheyenne, Wyoming, June 18-19, 2010.

Fenske said she learned tips from the Shepherd's Center on how to study as well as pointers for competing at local and state levels.

Fenske said she also takes a daily spelling word quiz online and checks the *Merriam Webster Word of the Day*. "I'm

also going through the dictionary page by page," she said.

This year the Wichita Bee committee members plan an oral warm up round to help participants relax on stage. Bond said, "I studied last year at Watermark Books—in the northwest corner where the dictionaries are."

In March, Mary Jo learned the cancer was in remission. This year she and Mary Ann are meeting in that same corner at Watermark Books to help Mary Ann prepare for the national competition.

If you are 50 or older, a resident the greater Wichita area, and want to compete in the August 10 Senior Spelling Bee contact the East Wichita Shepherd's Center at 682-0504 or visit their website at <http://www.ewshepherdscenter.org>.

Life Ventures

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that wasn't easily confused with other entities in the community. East Wichita Shepherd's Center just didn't seem to define what the organization has to offer.

"We are hoping to attract younger, newly retired people," said Barnett, the board president. "Shepherd's Center just isn't meaningful to younger people. We wanted an identity that is more uplifting,

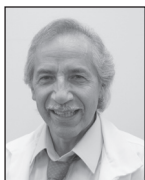
more enticing."

In a presentation at the last Tuesday of the spring Adventures in Learning session, the board explained that *Life Ventures: The Place to Keep Knowing and Growing* better describes the organization and helps set it apart from other organizations with shepherd in their name.

For more information about Life Ventures and to receive announcements about the upcoming Adventures in Learning programs, contact the office at 686-0504.

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Ricky Tejada, Pharmacist

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