BOOMTOWN
HOW TO LIVE YOUR BEST LIFE
IN COLUMBIA OVER 50

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Barney Sword, 84, has more than 100 medals for running  Page 20

April 23, 2017
Columbia: A booming city for any age

Columbia makes repeated appearances on lists ranking cities as good places to live. It is perhaps an even better place to mature and retire.

A strong health-care network, reasonable housing prices, a vibrant, engaged community and an appealing downtown help create an attractive location for all generations, but especially for those over 50.

Living in a college town with three campuses provides not only mental stimulation, but also arts and cultural experiences, good restaurants, shopping and opportunities to stay fit and active. The lovely countryside around Columbia offers trails to hike or cycle, rivers to paddle and parks where birds and other wildlife are abundant.

Sports fans can have a close connection to Division I football, basketball, baseball, softball and other teams. Columbia and Stephens colleges have their own fans, and major league sports franchises are a reasonable drive away in St. Louis and Kansas City.

All in all, Columbia has much to offer. For those over 50, it can be the place to sink roots and discover a fulfilling quality of life.
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If retirement is the time to do what you enjoy most, Gail Ludwig is on board. “I am totally enamored about not working,” she said earlier this year.

After teaching for 41 years and serving as National Geographic Society’s geographer-in-residence for two years, Ludwig began to redefine her identity. “I’m not a geographer anymore,” she said. “That was a hard thing for me to grasp.”

“All of the enthusiasm and drive I had when I was working has been pushed in other directions.” Those directions include golf, gardening, beekeeping, woodworking and powerlifting, in which she holds three national titles.

Ludwig stepped down as head of the MU Geography Department in 2007 and taught for three more years before retiring in 2010 at the age of 62. Then she taught geographic information systems off and on for three years in Vietnam and Korea before fully stepping into retirement.

“Retirement is great, but some people wait too long and when they retire, they don’t have their health,” Ludwig said. “That is absolutely critical to a good retirement.”

Today, she sees her job as working out and staying healthy. “It’s as much work, but joyful work, as when I was employed,” she said.

Fitness and health allowed her to travel to Spain last fall with her husband, Phil, and hike the Pyrenees mountain range, for example. Two to three times a week she lifts at the Optimus gym with Older Women on Weights — or OWOWs — a community of women, some retired, some not, who are committed to a healthy lifestyle. They encourage each other and keep one another accountable, Ludwig said.

Many in the group hold national weightlifting titles, as well as international records. In 2015, Ludwig attained national powerlifting titles within the American Drug-Free Powerlifting Federation in her age and weight class for bench press, dead lift and squats.

She made the switch to lifting at the suggestion of her daughter, a physical therapist. Since making the switch, one of the benefits has been growth in bone density, which is uncommon in older individuals, she said.

Paired with lifting, Ludwig practices tai chi, a practice that focuses on balance, breathing and stretching, at the Armory Sports Center in down-
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"That's when I want to make my mark," she said, "so I'm saving myself." Ludwig looks for ways to stay active in her retirement. "It's not as much work, but joyful work, as when I was employed," she said.

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ACHIEVERS

GAIL LUDWIG

Lives in: Columbia

Age: 69

Accomplishments: Junior high teacher, college professor, National Geographic Society geographer-in-residence, powerlifter

Her original workout routine was largely made up of swimming, but she made the switch to lifting at the suggestion of her daughter, a physical therapist. Since making the switch, one of the benefits has been growth in bone density, which is uncommon in older individuals, she said.

"That's when I want to make my mark," she said. "This is the stuff that keeps me going," she said.

"I started lifting weights because I was overweight and felt awkward," Ludwig said. "It's like 'Oh my god, if I come over and say, 'They look fine.'"

"That's the stuff that keeps me going," she said.

— By Marta Payne
Robert DeWitt operates on a schedule that rivals many of his younger counterparts.

Three evenings during the week around 4:30, the 52-year-old DeWitt heads to the Columbia Area Career Center for a welding class to fuse metal, experiment with electrodes and tinker with pipes.

He emphasizes the importance of trial and error when taking this sort of class. “If you’re not screwing stuff up, then you’re not learning,” he said.

At 1:30 a.m. after about four hours of sleep, he wakes up, brushes his teeth, gets dressed and leaves for work.

He gets to the B&B Bagel Company on Nifong Boulevard at 2:30 a.m. and makes bagels for up to eight hours. At 10:30, when most 9-5 workers are starting to think about a second cup of coffee, he heads home.

“I do a lot of sleeping in my off-time,” DeWitt said.

This strenuous cycle serves to bring him closer to his dream of owning a fabrication business. Every late night equips him with a new skill, every early morning reminds him what he’s saving up for, and every failed project brings him closer to success.

Taking on new challenges

Experts in neuroscience might call DeWitt a “superager,” someone 50 or older who retains the mental acuity of an individual in his or her 20s and 30s.

According to a September 2016 study in the Journal of Neuroscience, the key to becoming a superager is devoting serious attention to something — engaging in strenuous mental or physical tasks on a sustained basis.

According to The New York Times, “superagers are like Marines: They excel at pushing past the temporary unpleasantness of intense effort. Studies suggest that the result is a more youthful brain that helps maintain a sharper memory and a greater ability to pay attention.”

DeWitt has been taking the welding course at the CACC since August to master metalworking, the basis of becoming a full-time fabricator and working in a welding or machine shop.

“I came here to kind of round out my skill set,” DeWitt said about the Career Center.

He spent 27 years in the military and plans to use the next chapter of his life to learn, explore and have fun.

“Tiring half of my life is the fun half,” he said. “I’m going to enjoy myself from here on out. I don’t have to sleep under the stars, I don’t have to carry a rucksack and I’m gonna do what I wanna do.”

He is learning to fuse metal parts together by following technical drawings, blueprints and other specifications to build products ranging from sheet metal parts to metal molds.

John Goddard, 30, his primary welding instructor, said he loves having
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Robert DeWitt could be called a 'superager,' someone over 50 with the same mental agility as a 20-year-old. He wants to learn specialized welding techniques so he can open a fabrication business.

Story by Olivia Peterkin // Photos by Monique Woo

Robert DeWitt welds a piece of steel at the Columbia Area Career Center.

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“The more seasoned” DeWitt in his class became he has a level of focus not often seen in younger students. “If I stand up there and nobody knows what I’m talking about — but I’ve gone over it a few times — I can look over to Robert and say, ‘You’ve gone over this,’” Goddard said.

“I was told that with older generations you have to repeat stuff more, but I haven’t seen that.”

**Becoming a superager**

DeWitt does admit to facing a steep learning curve in mastering the difficult techniques in the class.

“I am terrible at stick welding,” he said. “I think it’s the most difficult skill to master of all the techniques and I honestly apply to it than burning an electrode.”

Stick welding, also known as “shovel metal arc welding,” is commonly used for smaller objects and requires the more precision.

DeWitt prefers using the tungsten inert gas method of welding, which is commonly used for larger pieces of machinery.

“I kind of live by the philosophy that you should learn something every day,” he said. “Regardless of what it is, whether it’s a new word, or it’s a new skill, or some silly fact. I don’t care how old you are. If you don’t learn something new, you’ve wasted a day.”

**How learning continues**

Katie Salter is a retired professor and past chair of the Geography Department at MU, and she now teaches at the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute for MU extension. The Osher institute is a community education center with courses “designed to complement the interests, concerns and lifestyles of the over-50 adult.”

Sailer teaches “Writing in the Fourth Quarter,” which covers fiction, poetry, journalistic writing, and memoir writing in the fourth sector of life. He strongly believes that learning is important for every age and that the dynamics that make learning most meaningful are ones in which you process your own observations, paying attention to the things in your personal world around you, it keeps your mind active. “At Osher, you get students who are maturing,” he said. “There’s no tests and they’re there because they think huh, I’d like to be interested.”

Salter also said Osher students seem truly interested in a subject, something less frequent on the college level. “At Osher, you get students who are maturing,” he said. “There’s no tests and they’re there because they think huh, I’d like to be interested.”

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Becoming a superager

DeWitt does admit to facing a steep learning curve in mastering the difficult techniques in the class.

“I am terrible at stick welding,” he said. “I think it’s the most difficult skill to master of all the techniques and it’s much closer to it than burning an electrode.”

Stick welding, also known as “shielded metal arc welding,” is commonly used for larger projects of machinery. DeWitt prefers using the tungsten inert gas method of welding, which applies to smaller objects and requires more precision.

“With the other techniques, I think I would have a harder time learning. I kind of live by the philosophy you should learn something every day,” he said. “Regardless of what it is, whether it’s a new word, or it’s a new skill, or some silly fact. I don’t care how old you are. If you don’t learn something new, you’ve wasted a day.”

How learning continues

Kit Salter, 78, is another candidate for consideration as a superager for the program at the career center.

“Hitchhiking kept me alive,” said Salter. “The same dynamics that you have with students in the class because he has a level of focus not often seen in younger students. “If I stand up there and nobody knows what I’m talking about — but I’ve gone over it about two or three times — I can look over to Robert and say ‘Hey, have you guys gone over this?’” Goddard said.

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“When he completes the course in July, he plans to work in a local shop, trying to push it farther, to make it grow.”

Salter teaches “Writing in the Fourth Quarter,” which covers fiction, poetry, journalistic writing, and memoir writing in the fourth sector of life. He strongly believes that learning is important for everyone at every age.

“The biggest fear is that people will assume an audience of 85- to 75-year-old people will have folks reading out, looking at their watches a lot, or just sitting there numbly,” he said.

“People ought to realize that behind a wall of gray hair and glasses there is a person trying to push it farther, to make it grow.”

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Extended learning opportunities in Columbia

Residents can take a wealth of classes from social media skills to master gardening through local education resources by Lily Mills

DANIEL BOONE REGIONAL LIBRARY
Website: www.dbrl.org/events
Fees: Free.
Registration: Most classes do not require registration, but check the website to be certain.
Details: This library, which serves residents in Boone and Callaway counties, offers community members the opportunity to interact and learn about a variety of topics. Adults are invited to take part in book discussions on the first Thursday of every month and listen to local musicians on the first Sunday of every month. Drop-in help is also available for computers and Internet, along with classes to learn about modern computer technology, such as Skype, Instagram, Facebook and Twitter.

COLUMBIA AREA CAREER CENTER
Website: www.career-center.org
Fees: Varies by course; occupational classes may be eligible for financial aid.
Registration: Varies by selected activity.
Details: Class options are suitable for all ages. Some teach skills to prepare for the modern work force, such as practical nursing, medical coding, real estate and welding. Others are for fun, like Latin dance, basic birding skills, conversational Spanish or Italian cuisine, for example.

OSHIER LIFELONG LEARNING INSTITUTE
Website: www.extension.missouri.edu/learnforlife/
Fees: Varies by course.
Registration: May 23 for summer session; Aug. 22 for fall session. For class registration, call 882-8189.
Details: The Osher Lifelong Learning Institute, an MU Extension program, is specifically geared to people age 50 and older. Classes meet once a week during the designated semesters. During the spring semester, classes offered included: Shakespeare at the Stratford Festival; The First 100 Days of Donald Trump’s presidency and Eric Greitens’ governorship; The History of Film: The 1950s; Where Were Your Ancestors During Previous Solar Eclipses?; and iPhones and iPads. Osher also offers extracurricular activities, such as a travel club, a Spanish club and Friday afternoon films. Some courses may require extra fees.

MU EXTENSION
Website: www.extension.missouri.edu
Fees: Varies by course.
Registration: Varies.
Details: The university offers yet another way for Columbia residents to learn new skills. Available areas of study include agriculture, environment, business and nutrition. Noncredit classes are also an option to explore; topics include master gardening and master wildlife.
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Cleo Kottwitz
Lives in: Columbia
Age: 82
Accomplishments: MU Extension youth development specialist, farmer, pastor, volunteer

Volunteering is more than a way to fill empty hours for Columbia resident Cleo Kottwitz. As a child in Gasconade County, where he often participated in community service projects. For more than 50 years, he has deliberately given his time to local and international organizations.

Through organizations such as Heifer International, the annual Columbia CROP Hunger Walk, the Audubon Society and many more, Kottwitz has lived his life with the purpose of serving others.

Today, Kottwitz and his wife, Judy, serve with the project at least once a month packing boxes. “Volunteering is more than a way to fill empty hours. It’s a great joy,” Kottwitz said.

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Kottwitz said: “We enjoy doing things together.”

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Today, Kottwitz and his wife, Judy, prepare a box of donated clothing for shipping while working at the Container Project in February.

The Container Project provides used clothing to people in need both in the United States and across the globe.

Kottwitz and his wife serve with the project at least once a month packing boxes.

“We enjoy doing things together.”

— By Marta Payne

Photos by Erin Achenbach

Thad Taylor, Elder Law Attorney

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Both Conveniently Located at 2600 S. Providence – 1/2 mile south of Faurot Field, across from the Stoney Creek Inn

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Colleen and Gary Ostercamp play a variety of chords and songs on the piano and guitar together. The couple met in college.