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Table of Contents	
More than just a taxi.....	3
Lonigan Looks Back on Time in Air Corps.....	6
Air Pollution's Harmful Effects On The Elderly.....	11
Air Pollution's Harmful Effects On The Elderly.....	11
Leave a Legacy for Future Generations	13
How To Keep Frustrating Felines Out of The Garden.....	15

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More than just a taxi

A ride with Merlin Berkey is like a ride in a parade.

People along the way wave and smile, and he smiles and waves back.

He often takes a moment to enjoy the sun at Dallas City Park in between rides. He will often find a place to relax while he waits for his next call so he doesn't drive around wasting gasoline.

"You meet a lot of people," Berkey said of being the owner of Polk County's sole taxi service, Squirrel's Taxi. "There's a lot of cool people out there."

Squirrel's Taxi started as a sort of community service — paid by donation. Berkey, whose nickname growing up was Squirrel, started as a designated driver.

He grew up as a logger, working at his family's operation since he was 10, and later working for Willamette



Industries and then Weyerhaeuser. When the mill closed in 2002, Berkey, 57, said he didn't have much to do.

"There was a taxi here in town at the time," he said. "The bartenders said the taxi didn't answer the phone or didn't show up. I said, my phone's on 24/7."

As word spread about his reliability, he got more and more people using his services. While his business started out accepting tips for being a designated driver, Squirrel's Taxi's clientele consists of much more than just drunks — though he does get his share of those.

Other customers just need a trip to the grocery store or bank — or home to Astoria after an evening at Spirit Mountain Casino. Berkey takes all kinds of people to all kinds of places. He takes people to doctor's appointments.

"I take people to the store, shopping, drop them off, shop, pick them up later, bar people, take them to church," Berkey said. "It's a variety."

He says driving a taxi is just like driving a car — with passengers.

"Some are more interesting than others," Berkey said. "Some are more talkative than others. I've got a lot of regulars."

Berkey takes people to the grocery store, or he will pick up some things for you.

If someone calls and needs some milk, for exam-

ple, but can't get out to the store because of a disability or they're just too busy, he'll be happy to pick it up and deliver it for them, he said.

That doesn't take away from the times he is available to make the roads safer by driving someone home who has had too much to drink at the bars.

Merlin Berkey takes people — mostly in Dallas — anywhere, from the grocery store and the bank to just providing a safe ride home.

One thing is certain in the life of a cab driver: every day is different. The number of rides varies depending on the day or month. He averages 15 to 25 rides per day on a weekday, and 45 to 50 rides on an average Friday.

Squirrel's Taxi in Dallas

Who: Merlin Berkey, owner of Squirrel's Taxi in Dallas.

Nickname: Squirrel, given to him by his brothers as a child, named for Squirrel of Merlin.

Hometown: Dallas.

Of note: Berkey will answer any call — as long as he isn't too fast asleep — but prefers to serve those in the Dallas area. Too often a call out to Monmouth or Independence has resulted in being stood up by the caller, wasting a good hour of his time.

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Pete Strong/Itemizer-Observer file

Len Lonigan was the navigator for a B-24 bomber crew during World War II. His plane, the Lucky Penny, was shot down and the entire crew had to bail out.

Lonigan Looks Back on Time in Air Corps

By Jolene Guzman
The Itemizer-Observer

FALLS CITY — Oct. 17 is a significant date for Falls City resident Leonard Lonigan.

That was the day his parents were married. And, in an eerie bit of foreshadowing, it was on that day in 1941 that his brother, Bill, who was in the U.S. Army Air Corps, was flying with his crew near Stayton when they had to bail out of their plane.

Lonigan, 96, would follow in his brother's footsteps in more than one way.

Just months after Pearl Harbor was bombed, Lonigan — who goes by Len — was just 20 years old, a student at the University of Oregon. With the country at war, Lonigan signed up for the Air Corp without a moment's notice.

He was assigned to a bombing crew after graduation and it was off to Europe. Lonigan and his crew had the classiest of rides across the Atlantic — The Queen Elizabeth. They also had some A-list entertainment as the Glen Miller Band was along for the voyage.

It was several weeks after landing before Lonigan's crew would move to England, its home base for the duration of its mission.

While waiting to fly his first mission, Lonigan heard stories about the war and witnessed the toll the war had taken on England.

"They told us some hair-raising stories that we hoped weren't true," Lonigan said.

Soon, Lonigan would have his own thrilling tales to share, the most memorable being Oct. 17, 1944.

"We were going to Cologne, Germany," Lonigan said. "That was a pretty tough target. (It was) well defended, a big city, lots of heavy rail. There was lots of ammunition there."

"One of the things they told you is don't look down.

So I thought I would look down to see why..."

As feared, the squadron was under heavy antiaircraft fire when the copilot of Lonigan's plane, the Lucky Penny, saw the signal for "bombs away" - a smoke bomb dropped from formation's the lead plane. He told the crew's bombardier to release the plane's cargo. Lonigan said the bombardier opened the first of three bomb doors before the pilot declared the signal false. German soldiers had sent up a smoke bomb, a tactic used to trick bombing crews into dropping too early.

"One bomb had left the plane," Lonigan said. "After that left, an 88 mm shell came up through the (bomb bay), through the main gas line and exploded above the plane. Hardly any damage to the plane ... if you didn't consider an

88 mm shell through your main gas line damage."

The plane would not make it back home, but the crew had more pressing problems to worry about. They turned off their electric heated suits and plane radio for fear of sparks igniting leaking gas and blowing them out of the sky.

One of the crew members heroically tried to stop the gas leak, stuffing it with whatever he could find, but to no avail.

It was up to the pilot and copilot to keep the plane in the air and Lonigan to get them to a safe point to land or bail out. He gave a heading for Belgium.

"I know if we go due west, we will be in good shape eventually," Lonigan said.

The only problem was with heavy clouds below them, they couldn't see where they were. The pilot flew beneath the clouds and into a terrifying sight: German force gearing up for the Battle of the Bulge.

"When we came out, I have never seen or imagined a place with so many German tanks," Lonigan recalled. "So here's this whole bunch of German tanks and, an unfriendly bunch, they started shooting at us."

They flew back into the clouds briefly before coming down again. This time they saw a Belgium flag flying. They were behind the Allied lines - time to bail out.

By protocol, the navigator is the first to bail, so Lonigan was first out.



Having only seen one video on bailing out, he wasn't so sure what to do.

He left it in the hands of fate and slid out of the plane, luckily clearing safely and pulling his parachute.

Lonigan did remember one detail: "One of the things they told you is don't look down. So I thought I would look down to see

why ... the ground was coming up extremely fast," he said.

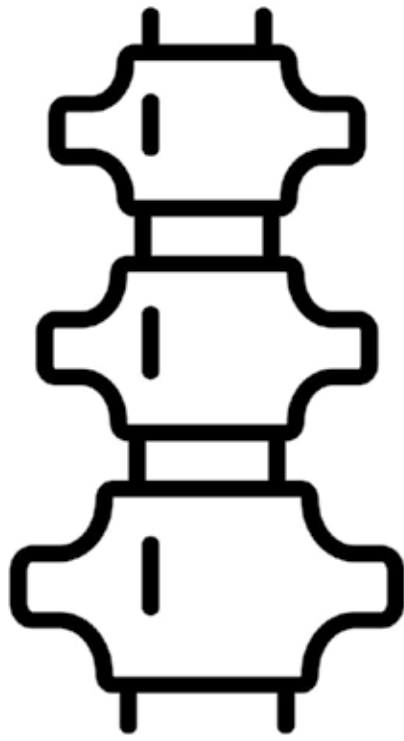
The entire crew made it out safely, but Lucky Penny's luck ran out; the plane exploded on impact.

Lonigan's daughter, Kay Dixon, said she grew up hearing her father's stories and doesn't let him get away with being humble.

"The heroes were all on the ground," Lonigan insists.

"I would say anyone who gave up their life to go over there was a hero," Dixon said in response. "He says he's not a hero, but he's been my hero all my life."





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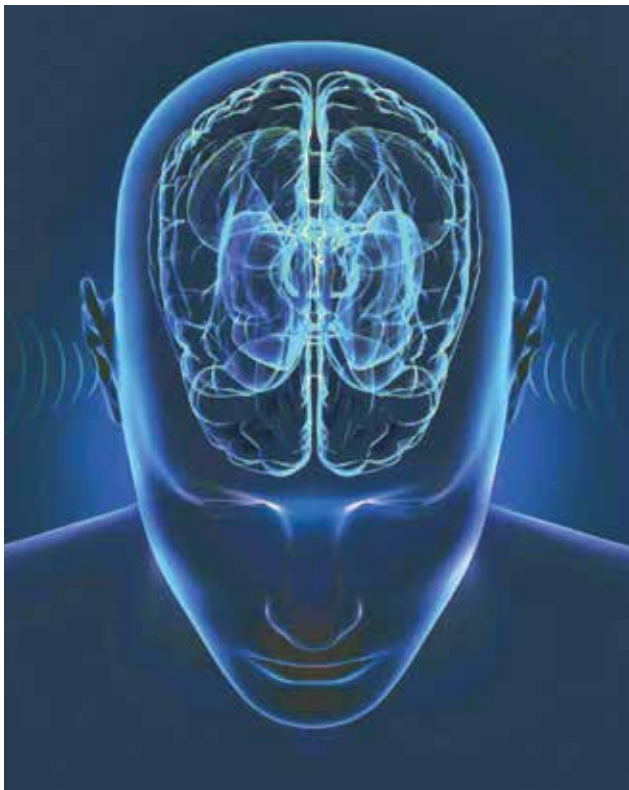
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Better hearing linked to mental health



The Hidden Risks of Hearing Loss

In the last few years, researchers have made startling connections with good hearing and mental fitness. Conversely, we have learned that a loss of hearing represents more than just difficulty hearing sounds. It often leads to social isolation and depression. Studies seem to show that hearing loss may also be linked to loss of memory and thinking skills.

Johns Hopkins researchers found that declines in thinking skills happened faster among people with hearing loss than those without it. Diminished hearing can lead to less brain stimulation.

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Air Pollution's Harmful Effects On The Elderly

Air pollution is a health concern for everyone, but even more so for the elderly.

When the pollution indexes are up, advisories are made for anyone with respiratory illness to not venture outside. Sometimes, these go further and advise against any strenuous outside activity for everyone. These warnings should be taken with concern, and the elderly should stay indoors on these days.

Now, the indoor air pollution can sometimes be worse than it is outside, and also cause seniors to experience serious issues. Luckily, technology has made it so that we can finally clean the air inside the house so that it is breathable and clean.

There are numerous air filtration systems that can remove a lot of the matter you see floating around in the sunlight that peeks through the blinds. As for which one you choose, that is mostly a matter of preference.

HEPA filters are good at removing the particles from

the air that can cause a respiratory episode, but the filters need to be cleaned frequently, or else they clog up.

Carbon-activated filters are good for removing foul odors and gaseous chemicals that the HEPA filter cannot. However, carbon filters cannot remove dust, pollen, and larger particles, so it is recommended to purchase an air purifier with both a HEPA and a carbon-activated filter. The two filters will work to remove 99.97 percent of airborne contaminants.

No matter what you select, make sure to follow all manufacturers' recommendations and schedules.

Due to the factors that affect seniors, what would cause a younger and healthier person a mild discomfort can turn into a chronic and even fatal infection for an older person.

The strike against the elderly when it comes to air pollution is that they have been alive longer, and in general, have breathed in

more pollution than someone younger.

Another factor at play is that the elderly tend to have weaker immune systems. As the body gets physically weaker, so does all the other systems at work in the body. With the loss of physical vigor, hormone levels drop, healing takes longer, and the immune system will struggle with bacteria that it once dispatched with ease. This is a huge reason why an unhealthy pollution index will cause discomfort for a young athlete, but seniors are advised to stay indoors.

When people struggle to filter out and dispose of air pollution, other diseases affecting both the heart and the lungs can become an issue. So, when the air pollution index is up, these diseases can become worse. Studies have shown that hospitals around the country know that when the ozone and particulate matter is up, the number of seniors coming in the emergency room will increase.

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Leave a Legacy for future generations

DALLAS — In 1995, a group of Dallas citizens decided they wanted to make a difference in their community.

They each pitched in \$100 and the Dallas Community Foundation was born. DCF made its first distribution in 1996.

"They wanted to establish a fund that would support the needs of the Dallas community now and into the future," said Mia Mohr, the foundation's administrator. "Since 1996 the foundation has given back nearly \$1 million."

This year, the foundation gave away \$40,000 in grants to local nonprofits and will offer about \$35,000 in scholarships to graduating high school seniors.

Mohr said DCF is all about being local.

"The board of directors are local people. They understand local needs and issues. They are good stewards of the funds entrusted to them," Mohr said. "They ensure that the funds are

used to make a positive impact."

Mohr said local support is necessary to accomplish the foundation's mission.

"The work we do is possible because of gifts from the people in the community," Mohr said. "The gifts, large and small, and bequests from people's estates make it possible for us to do all this."

Mohr said those wanting to donate to the foundation can allow the board to find the best way use the money, or they can set up a designated scholarship or grant fund for a specific purpose.

"What's the cause or issue that you are passionate about now that you can continue to support even after you are gone?" Mohr said. "We have the means to administer these funds so that they will serve in perpetuity."

She said a recently established scholarship directs money to students who are first-generation college at-

tenders, or who are homeless or in a single-parent household. Another was set up by a couple to honor life of their son who died.

"It's a great way for people to leave a legacy for future generations," Mohr said.

Giving to your community

What: Dallas Community Foundation

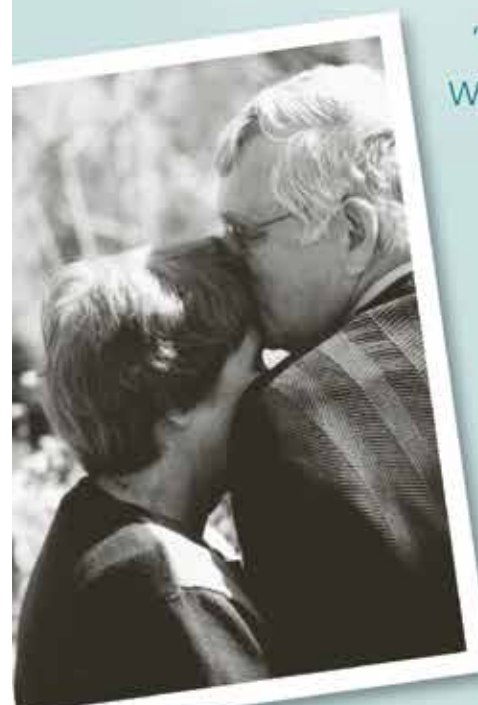
Contact: 503-798-7847; info@dallascommunityfoundation.com.

Board members: Bob Brannigan, Jim Fowler, Michelle Johnstone, Susan Morrill, Bob Ottaway, Dave Parrett, Lane Shetterly, Bob Timmerman, and Chantel Williamson.

Mission: "To enhance the quality of life in the Dallas community by building a culture of giving."

To learn more or to donate: dallascommunityfoundation.com or find the foundation on Facebook.

*He visited with friends,
swam with his grandsons,
spent time at the beach.*



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How to keep frustrating felines out of the garden

By Kym Pokorny,
OSU Extension

As they slink through our gardens, scratching at beds and doing their duty, cats drive many gardeners nuts.

Even most cat lovers agree that discouraging them is preferable to giving them free rein. But deterring them is easier said than done. It takes persistence and patience, said Brooke Edmunds, a horticulturist with Oregon State University Extension Service.

"There's a lot of frustration in dealing with cats," she said. "They have different behaviors. The garden can be a bathroom or a place where they mark their territory. Or maybe they just decide a sun bath on your favorite plants is just the thing for them."

Of course, keeping kitty indoors is the best answer, but talking neighbors into that can be problematic. And then there are feral cats that are more difficult to deal with than domestic felines.

If your own kitty has been an indoor-outdoor cat, you may want to transition her inside with a screened-in "catio." Provide climbing structures, rocks or flagstone for them to sun on, toys and water. Add some catnip or cat grass to make them happy. But putting food out is not a great idea

More tips for keeping cats at bay

- Though there's no scientific evidence to back it up, some people swear by repellents. They must be reapplied often and can be expensive. The active ingredient in these products varies. The most common are oils (cinnamon, clove, thyme, garlic, etc.), putrescent whole egg solids, dried blood, etc. Whichever you choose, make sure to fully read the label and only apply according the instructions. Because these products work by using scents that cats prefer to avoid, the product will likely need to be reapplied often. Obviously, you're not going to like the smell either.
- Motion-activated sprinklers work with an infrared field. When a cat wanders into it, the sprinkler shoots out a stream of water. "But cats are smart," Edmunds said. "They may figure out how far the water goes and move around it."
- To keep from attracting cats, don't feed your pets – or any other animals – outside and keep your grill clean.
- Secure trash bins.
- Clear away debris where mice might live.
- Board up access to structures they may use for refuge.
- Anecdotal evidence shows that cats dislike the smell of lavender, pennyroyal, rue, lemon thyme and Coleus canina (also called scaredy cat plant).

because it can draw rats and other wildlife, Edmunds said.

Even if your own cat stays inside, you've got little control over fence-climbing visitors. There are, however, measures you can take to make it less likely they'll visit. Really.

Edmunds uses black-colored bird netting to cover the soil in parts of the garden she wants to keep cat free. Additional material might be chicken wire, mesh produce bags from oranges and potatoes, or pinecones. Lay it on the ground or slightly under the soil and the cats will get an unwelcome surprise when they start scratching.

Thin bamboo stakes

or forks placed among the plants will also thwart them; leave those sticking out of the soil so you don't accidentally put your hand on a sharp object.

"The bottom line is that it's going to be specific to your yard," she said. "No one thing is the solution. Be creative and think like a cat. What does the cat get from the garden. Are they looking for a cat box, a hunting area, plants to roll on or eat, marking territory. Maybe they're just passing through and using your shrubbery for protection."

Once you grasp the inner workings of a cat's brain – if that's possible – start to think about what's most important to you and con-

centrate on those areas.

If you have one, an edible garden plot should be first on your list to protect. Cats can carry diseases that can transmit to humans through feces.



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