

Amazing Aging!

For Seniors and Those Who Love Them

**A free publication of the Jayhawk Area Agency on Aging, Inc.
Advocacy, Action and Answers on Aging for Shawnee, Jefferson and Douglas Counties**

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Our Mission

Jayhawk Area Agency on Aging, Inc. advocates on aging issues, builds community partnerships and implements programs within Shawnee, Jefferson, and Douglas counties to help seniors live independent and dignified lives.

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JIM AND NANCY YONALLY STAND BY THE TREE THEY COMMISSIONED DAN BESCO TO CARVE WITH KU'S JAYHAWK MASCOTS IN HONOR OF NANCY'S PARENTS, DAVID AND MARGARET SHIRK (PLEASE SEE STORY ON PAGE 3).

Nancy Yonally honors her parents, Margaret and David Shirk, with a Jayhawk tree

By Marsha Henry Goff

As a child, Margaret Lewis loved the big white mulberry tree in yard of the large and elegant farmhouse where she grew up. The house was built by her father Fred V. Lewis in 1920 on land her grandfather David Hamilton Lewis settled in 1865.

After graduating from KU, she married David Shirk, a football, track and wrestling star athlete whom she met in college. After David's service in World War II, Margaret lived wherever his work as a high school physical education teacher and coach took their family, but she always returned to her parents' home in the summers and worked at KU while her mother cared for her children.

When her mother died in 1956, Margaret inherited the

home and she and David lived happily in the shade of the tree until David's death in 2009 at the age of 93. Margaret continued to live there alone until her death in 2017 at the age of 100. She outlasted the tree, estimated to be 200 years old, which split in two in 2016, the north half crashing to the ground. "First the tree," Margaret Shirk said, "then I'll be next."

Her daughter Nancy Yonally, who now owns and lives in the home with her husband Jim, was horrified and exclaimed, "Mother!" The remaining half of the tree was taken down because it was feared to be dangerous, but the man with the tree service company left a tall portion of the trunk, saying, "That is perfect for carving."

Carving Jayhawks into the tree trunk seemed like



The 200 year old white mulberry tree was massive in its glory days.

a meaningful way to honor her parents, so Nancy called Dan Besco, doing business

as Kansaw Carvings, who is licensed by KU — and pays

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Nancy Yonally asked Dan Besco to place the Lawrence brick in the tree to honor her father's work on Lawrence Streets when he was in college.



Besco carved David Shirk's athletic jersey with the number 55, one of his numbers at KU.

Jayhawk tree

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the university a royalty — to carve Jayhawks. While Besco has been carving with a chainsaw for 20 years, he has been licensed to carve Jayhawks for the last three years.

Nancy gave him free-reign to carve the tree as he wished. He says that the design depends on the tree and he had plenty of room to carve all of the six evolving Jayhawk mascots that have served KU, beginning with the first in 1912. At the top of the trunk, Besco carved a four-and-a-half-foot tall current mascot, the Happy Jayhawk, designed by Hal Sandy in 1946. He also carved an athletic shirt adorned with 55, one of her father's numbers. At Nancy's request, he embedded a Lawrence brick in the tree. She thought it appropriate because her father had a job working on city streets during summers while at col-

lege.

It took Besco about ten days to carve the tree and paint the Jayhawks. "Painting," he says, "helps preserve the carvings." He adds that the project was "by far the most meaningful carving I have done because of the family history ... home-steaded in the 1860s. I just wish I could have met Margaret Shirk."

It was her indomitable spirit, not her longevity, that made Margaret worth knowing. She was an astute investor and stockbroker, a volunteer for the Red Cross for almost 50 years and served as presiding judge of her election board for about 65 years. When she had breast cancer and a mastectomy in 1960, she was given a Mayo Clinic one-shot treatment of horse serum and, according to Margaret's statement in a 2015 interview, "I've been galloping ever since."

"And the week after her cancer surgery," Nancy adds, "she was



Detail of 1920, 1923, 1929 and 1941 Jayhawks. The tail of the large Jayhawk is inserted and glued in place.

painting the bathroom because she didn't want to get stiff."

But the reason the carved Jayhawk tree is such an appropriate honor for Margaret and David Shirk is because of their love for KU sports. The couple had season tickets for KU football and basketball games since they were married in 1940 and never missed a home game if they were in the area. After David's death, Margaret continued to be a fixture at games and greatly enjoyed dancing with the Baby Jay mascot that towered over her since she only measured four feet, six inches and weighed 70 pounds in her later life.

Though small, she was energetic and walked multiple laps every day on the sidewalk that circled her home, often followed, according to Nancy, by

one critter or another. "One year she had a robin that stayed beside her. And then she had a rabbit that followed her as she walked. She walked 40 laps, then 30, 20, 10, then, when she got down to five, she'd walk one lap and then sit in a chair, then she'd walk the other way and sit in that chair."

Nancy and Jim are carrying on her family's legacy of enthusiastic and creative service. Jim is a former Kansas legislator, teacher, administrator and broadcaster. "For 41 years," he says, "I have been photo steward for the Big 8, Big 12, Missouri Valley and NCAA basketball tournament. I sit right behind the photographers just off the court to make sure that they get in the

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Detail of the first Jayhawk mascot created in 1912 by Henry Maloy. Note Dan Besco's initials and year of the carving under the Jayhawk.

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www.jhawkaaa.org.



Nearing her 100th birthday, Margaret Shirk sits amid the wreckage of the 200-year-old white mulberry tree she loved.

Jayhawk tree

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proper place.”

Nancy is an avid crafter, teaches quilting and has a passion for genealogy. She did costumes for Overland Park’s Theatre in the Park and she and Jim, along with their sons, volunteered for the Renaissance Festival in Bonner Springs for 20 years. Nancy jokes that “Jim

had to keep working to pay for the volunteer work.”

The couple is welcoming of people who visit to see the Jayhawk tree or who wish to take photos of it or with it. The portion of the tree containing the carvings is still alive, as evidenced by the growth at the bottom and, because Nancy had a company treat the portion that had termites, the Jayhawk tree should have a long life ahead of it. Rock chalk!

Medicare Open Enrollment

October 15 through December 7

Check out the many ways JAAA can help you decide on the best Medical Supplement and Part D Rx plans for you!

Schedule an appointment with JAAA

We will have appointments available at JAAA Monday-Friday 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. during open enrollment. We will begin taking appointments in late September for Open Enrollment. We are closed the following dates during open enrollment 11/12, 11/22 and 11/23. We have a limited number of appointments and they will be scheduled on a first come first serve basis.

Take part in a walk in clinic at JAAA

We are having the Saturday Clinics for Open Enrollment on the following Saturdays:

October 20, 2018

October 27, 2018

November 3, 2018

November 10, 2018

December 1, 2018

From 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. — first come first served, those in door prior to 1:00 p.m. will be helped no matter how late we have to stay to do so. Please be aware that there may be a lengthy wait time.

Attend JAAA’s DIY Medicare Part D Classes at Topeka/Shawnee County Public Library

We encourage everyone to consider attending the Medicare Part D DIY classes that JAAA provides at the Topeka/Shawnee County Public Library on the second Thursday of the month at 9:30 a.m. We will walk attendees step by step through the Medicare Plan Finder and explain how to navigate and understand the information being provided to you so that you can make an informed choice regarding your Medicare Part D plan. We provide this training year round so don’t wait until open enrollment and take the opportunity now!

