

OUR TOWN

ALL OURS, ALL HOURS



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Brewer Backs Club

FASHION FOCUS
OF FUNDRAISER

More than 300 Boys & Girls Club of Fayetteville supporters and Ronnie Brewer Foundation backers joined forces July 30 for the inaugural A Night with the Stars fundraiser. The \$80,000 raised at the benefit held at the Fayetteville Town Center will go toward the \$770,000 the Brewer Foundation has pledged to help the club build a new gymnasium and life center.

Founded by the NBA Chicago Bulls player, a gym is in keeping with Ronnie's emphasis on education, physical fitness and working together as a team.

Ronnie's sister Candice told us she and her siblings spent a lot of time at the Fayetteville Boys & Girls club as children and this is a way to give back. Candice serves on the foundation's board of director.

Boys & Girls Club Youth and Family Programs Director Glenda Deffebaugh told me the new gym will allow the club to expand programming and serve more children. The two existing gyms at the club are at capacity.

Each day the club in west Fayetteville serves approximately 150 children during the school year and more than 250 during the summer. Glenda said new programming will be designed to "emphasize healthy lifestyle and get kids moving."

Next up for the foundation is the inaugural Brew Crew golf tournament slated for Sept. 3 at Paradise Valley Golf Club in Fayetteville.

Those helping Brewer back the club included his parents **Carolyn and Ron Brewer Sr., Frank Broyles, Jamie and Michael Banks, Dick Johnson, Neil Shipley, Jane and Dave Gearhart and Laura and Conrad Odom.**

Thursday morning's respite from the heat was welcomed by a sold-out crowd of 100 gathered for brunch at the Springdale home of **Dorothy and Al Hanby.**

The occasion was a brunch and fashion show fundraiser in support of The Jones Center. The more than \$5,000 raised will go toward the center's children's programming that includes Spring Break Week, Summer Youth Academy, a back-to-school backpack program and the remodeling of the Youth Center.

Fashions modeled came from By Request and 3 Monkeys. Chef **Steven Brooks** from the Springdale Country Club provided the brunch of vegetable quiche, fresh fruit, croissants and flourless chocolate cake.

The Jones Center's annual Golf Outing is slated for Sept. 12 at the Springdale Country Club.

Those focusing on fashion to fund the Jones Center included **Linda Wray, Johnelle Hunt, Virginia George, Earlene Henry, Shirley Esch, Gaye Cypert, Carol Lynn Gibson, Mary Stockland, Susan Schallhorn, Debby Weiser, Denise Garner, Kelly Zega, Tina Hodne and Joy Drummonds.**

The Friends of Hospice Special Events committee gathered for lunch Thursday afternoon at



Mike and Sharon Mencl say they laugh all the time, even though Mike is challenged by aphasia as the result of a massive stroke.

COURTESY PHOTOS

ENJOYABLY IN LOVE

When Words Aren't Enough

APHASIA SLOWS
VETERAN BUT CAN'T
KEEP HIM DOWN

By Becca Bacon Martin
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Mike and Sharon Mencl are clearly, obviously, enjoyably in love. They laugh a lot. They're quick to reach out to one another. They finish each other's sentences — literally.

None of that's unusual for a couple that's been married only three years.

What sets the Mencls apart from most relative newlyweds is their age — she is 57, he is 60 — and the massive stroke that Mike suffered just three months into their marriage. He lost the use of a fist-size portion of his brain, spent five months in hospitals and nursing homes and even now relies on a wheelchair for mobility.

"I tell him he just proved I was right all along," Sharon says with one of her frequent laughs. "I told him he didn't use his brain. Clearly he didn't, if he can get along without a big piece of it."

Mike smiles at her, enjoying her sense of humor. He's "smart," he tells her.

"Well, if you're smart, what am I?" Sharon comes back.

"Brilliant," he says, grinning.

Most of Mike's verbal communication is limited to a word or two at a time, but it's not because he's lost cognition. Mike suffers from something called aphasia, a disconnect between his brain and his ability to say the words he's thinking.

"Aphasia is more prevalent than Parkinson's, more prevalent than cerebral palsy, yet most Americans not directly touched by this condition have no idea what it is," says Dr. Patrick Doyle, director of the PIRATE program at the Veterans Affairs Healthcare System in Pittsburgh. "Raising awareness is critical."

"The irony is that the condition itself prevents people affected by it to advocate for themselves."

A Massive Stroke

The journey for the Mencls started on Aug. 27, 2008 — "two weeks to the day after Mike's annual VA physical," his wife recalls. "He was given a perfect bill of health. His blood



Mike Mencl spent time in the hospital, in rehab and at a nursing home before he was able to care for himself.

"Mike and God had a conversation. I don't know what was said, but I knew. But I knew."

SHARON MENCL

On her husband's stroke and subsequent recovery

work came back dead center in every category."

Sharon, a social worker, was employed in the Bentonville schools and called home at noon to tell her husband she had an appointment in northwest Benton County after work. He was fine, she recalls.

"For reasons known only to God, I drove home instead of where I intended to go," she says. She found Mike on the garage floor, unresponsive.

"I called 9-1-1 and tried to keep him with me," she says. "There was part of him trying to stay; I

could see it in his eyes. But it was very fleeting."

Mike doesn't remember anything about his stroke, his hospitalization at Mercy Medical Center or his first stay at HealthSouth in Fayetteville. His first memory is being a resident at The Maples at Har-Ber Meadows, a skilled nursing facility in western Springdale, six weeks after his stroke.

The original prognosis was bleak, Sharon says.

"At Mercy, the neurologist held my hand and told me I needed to

be comfortable with the fact that Mike would be in a slightly better than vegetative state," she says. "And I should be glad that he wouldn't feel any pain."

She reaches over and lightly pinches her husband on his affected hand. They both laugh. "He feels pain," she says.

But by dawn on Aug. 28, Sharon Mencl says she knew her husband would live and that he would recover.

"Mike and God had a conversation," she says, while she sat at his bedside in the intensive care unit. "I don't know what was said, but I knew."

At that point, she says, she could still put her finger on her husband's eyeball, and there was no reaction.

"But I knew."

Surviving Vietnam

Then the ongoing process of recovery began in earnest — occupational therapy, physical therapy, speech therapy. By December 2008, during his second stay at HealthSouth, he learned to walk with assistance, transfer himself from bed to wheelchair and back, read — and say "Sharon."

"It became very obvious that the big hurdle was going to be the aphasia," Sharon says.

It was Barbara Shadden at the University of Arkansas Speech & Hearing Clinic who suggested that Mike might want to use his veterans' benefits and see what was available through the VA medical system.

Mencl, just 17 when he enlisted in the Marine Corps, was stationed in Okinawa, Japan, during the Vietnam War, making sorties in and out of the war zone. He considered becoming a career Marine. But a motorcycle accident while he was in special training at Camp Lejeune, N.C., ended his career. An intoxicated soldier backed into the bike Mencl was driving, and he ended up with his jaw, collarbone and right leg shattered, his left knee separated, screws in his ankle and more. After four months in the hospital, he was honorably discharged.

Almost 22 years old, Mencl went home to Iowa, became a machinist and pursued his hobbies, riding his Harley-Davidson and scuba diving.

"He's one of those rare and lucky people who turned something he loved into a career," Sharon fills in the story.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Color Of Hope

Arkansas Children's Hospital

The third annual Color of Hope charity gala to benefit Arkansas Children's Hospital will begin at 5:30 p.m. Friday at the John Q. Hammons Center in Rogers.

The evening will include dinner, dancing and live and silent auctions. Guests for the cocktail-attire event are encouraged to wear this year's color of hope — chocolate. Tickets are \$200. Information: 479-695-1303.

Cool Summer Night Gala

Kendrick Fincher Hydration Foundation

The Cool Summer Night Gala to benefit the Kendrick Fincher Hydration Foundation will begin at 7 p.m. Aug. 20 at the Bentonville Plaza.

The evening will feature a silent auction, food from Crabby's Seafood Grille, cocktails and live music from Boom Kinetic. Tickets for the

white-attire event are \$100 or \$750 for a table for eight. Information: 773-704-2413 or www.kendrickfincher.org.

Beach House On The Hill

Circle Of Life Hospice

The Northwest Arkansas Parrothead Club will host Beach House on the Hill to benefit Circle of Life Hospice at 6 p.m. Aug. 20 at George's Majestic Lounge in Fayetteville. The evening will include live music from the Boat Drunks and Cruise Control, a cheeseburger meal, live and silent auctions and a 50/50 raffle. Tickets are \$25.

Information: www.nwparrotheads.com

Almost Starry, Starry Night

Youth Bridge

Starry, Starry Night Almost Vincent Van Gogh Masterpiece Challenge and Art Auction will be from

6:30 to 10 p.m. Sept. 9 at the east Fayetteville home of Denise and Hershey Garner. Tickets for the benefit for Youth Bridge are \$35 in advance and \$45 at the door. A reserved table for six is \$300. Information: 575-9471.

Savor The Flavor

Faith In Action

The 2011 Savor the Flavor tasting tour fundraiser for Faith in Action will be Sept. 6 in the Dickson Street area in Fayetteville. Tasting will be from 5 to 9 p.m. at participating restaurants and the after-party will be from 8 to 10 p.m. at The Garden Room. Information: 463-7862.

Golden Days Of Radio

NWACC Scholarship Fund

The second annual Golden Days of Radio to benefit the Northwest Arkansas Community College Scholarship Fund will begin

at 7 p.m. Aug. 20 at the Rogers Little Theater in Rogers.

The evening will include a performance from the Route 66 Playhouse and desserts from the Northwest Arkansas Community College culinary arts program. Tickets for the cocktail-attire event are \$35. Vintage attire is encouraged. Sponsorships are available for \$500, \$2,000 and \$3,000.

Polo In The Ozarks

Life Styles Inc.

The 22nd annual Polo in the Ozarks to benefit Life Styles Inc. is slated to begin at 4 p.m. Sept. 10 at the Buell farm in Goshen. The polo grounds are approximately five miles east from the intersection of Arkansas 45 and Arkansas 265 in the Polo Country Estates.

Tickets for the polo match and tailgating only are \$15 for adults and \$10 for children ages 7 to 12. Admission is free for children 6 and under. Admission to the full event

— polo match, dinner and dance — is \$75 for adults and \$25 for children ages 7 to 12. Information: 521-3581.

Chill With The Hills

Seven Hills Homeless Shelter

A benefit for Seven Hills Homeless Shelter will be from 7 to 11 p.m. Sept. 9 at the Arkansas Air Museum at Drake Field in Fayetteville. The evening will include barbecue from area restaurants, live music from Big 'Uns and an end-of-the-evening balloon drop. Balloons will contain door prizes. Tickets for the casual event are \$50. Information: 251-7776 ext. 751.

Ultimate Tailgate, Sports Auction

Pagnozzi Charities

The 20th annual Charity Golf Tournament, Ultimate Tailgate and Sports Auction

to benefit Pagnozzi Charities are slated for Sept. 15 and 16. Teams for morning and afternoon flights in the golf tournament at Fayetteville Country Club are \$900. The tailgate and sports auction will begin at 7 p.m. Sept. 16 at the Fayetteville Town Center. Information: 443-2550.

Book Sale 2011, Preview Party

Haas Hall Academy

The Haas Hall Academy Book Sale 2011 Preview Party will be from 6 to 8:30 p.m. Sept. 23 at East Square Plaza on the Fayetteville downtown square.

Guests will get first pick of the thousands of gently used books, DVDs, CDs and video games that are part of the school's annual fundraiser slated from 7 a.m. to 4 p.m. Sept. 24. Tickets for the Preview Party are \$25, and reservations are required. There will be a book limit of 25 per person at the preview. Information: 263-2367.

— STAFF REPORT

APHASIA: PIRATE Program Tailored For One-On-One Interaction With Intensive Therapy

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3D

Mike became a course director for the Professional Association of Diving Instructors, the highest level of expertise attainable, and taught diving in Maui, Hawaii.

Healthy and athletic, Mike had never really needed the VA much — until now.

The PIRATE Program

It was Donna Edgmon, a speech therapist at the Veterans Health Care System of the Ozarks in Fayetteville, who first introduced the Mencls to PIRATE — an acronym for the Program for Intensive Residential Aphasia Treatment & Education.

“He came to mind immediately when I heard about it,” Edgmon says. “He’s a young man and wants to be active, and he has a really dynamic wife who wants him to achieve all he can.”

PIRATE does the same thing Edgmon has done and is continuing to do — introduce ways for Mencl to compensate for the times when the connections in his brain fail. But the Pittsburgh program does it with an intensity that’s unique, says Doyle, the program’s director.

The PIRATE program is tailored for one-on-one interaction, bringing three veterans at a time to the VA campus in Pittsburgh for a month of intensive therapy. Patients and therapists work together as long as six hours a day, six days a week, with additional training and education for the patients’ significant others.

The other thing that sets PIRATE apart, Doyle says, is the expertise of its staff and faculty.

“There aren’t very many centers in the country that have this number of clinical scientists devoted to the study of aphasia,” he says. “We’re fortunate we have a geriatric research center with a focus on stroke prevention, treatment and rehabilitation. That’s what has allowed us to pull together all of these researchers.”

Success is measured based on testing, evaluation by the patient and evaluation by the patient’s significant other. PIRATE’s numbers are high. Eighty-three percent of spouses reported improvement, as did 76 percent of patients. And performance testing revealed improvement in 83 percent of participants.

Road To Recovery

Sharon pulls out a photo album chronicling the



COURTESY PHOTOS

Mike and Sharon Mencl still do the things they enjoy, like visiting zoos.



Mike Mencl used photos he took over years of scuba diving to create this porthole-shaped mural. His art won first place in a local Veterans Affairs art show and will be shown nationally in October.

Mencls’ trip to Pittsburgh and their brief beach vacation afterward. Mike, filling in names, locations and special moments, like great meals of lobster and pizza and stops at zoos, aviaries, the Louisville slug-

ger factory and “anyplace else we thought might be fun to explore,” Sharon adds.

She uses a dry-erase board to help him find the words. Often writing the first letter is enough to prompt him. She’s careful to make sure

WEB WATCH
PIRATE PROGRAM
 To find out more about the VA's PIRATE program, visit
www.pittsburgh.va.gov/pirate

she’s not putting words in his mouth, however. “Do you want help?” “Did I get that right?”

“I’m his translator, not his interpreter,” she makes the distinction. “I may be the person that conveys the information, but that’s all. It’s Mike’s information.”

In her usual positive way, Sharon counts among her blessings the fact that she and her husband have no miscommunication.

“We’ve taken it back to the basics,” she says. “Yes or no.”

“Just because a person can’t speak, in no way, shape or form defines their intelligence or who they are,” she says adamantly.

“Am I right?” she asks

her husband.

“Yes,” he says.

“Was having a stroke a bad thing?” she asks him.

“No.”

Life, Uninterrupted

Now almost three years out from the stroke, the Mencls continue to move on with their lives. Sharon is in private practice as a social worker. Sharon’s daughter, Megan, who moved home from New Mexico to help in her stepfather’s recovery, is back at work. Mike is in therapy four days a week, volunteers at Helping Hands in Bentonville and keeps busy with his dogs, Maezy & Rhett, watching birds and maintaining nine bird feed-

ers, gardening and discovering a way to adapt an old hobby into a new one. He’s using the photos he took while scuba diving to make art, and his first big project, a collage, won first place in the local visual arts portion of the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival. It’ll be part of a national exhibition Oct. 23 at the VA in Fayetteville.

The couple is saving up to turn the Harley into a trike, and Sharon has taken lessons so she can drive it. And on June 28, Mike went scuba diving again for the first time since the stroke. “He was truly in his element,” Sharon says. “He came up from the dive grinning from ear to ear.”

“We laughed all the time before the stroke, and we laugh all the time now,” Sharon says. “We have a good time whatever we do and are blessed on a daily basis.”

“Yes,” Mike says.