

## A Time to Celebrate

December 23, 2021

It is a time to celebrate, and I bring glad tidings. This is a wonderful time of the year, and there are so many decent people who work hard every day to make good things happen. I want to tell you about some of these.

Ballinger, Runnels County and the surrounding area are becoming healthier by reversing the trends that had threatened the centuries-long trend in increasing life expectancy. For many hundreds of years, on a global basis, and for all of the history of this great country, life expectancy has been increasing. This has been too often attributed to better medicines or better governance, and it is neither of these. Instead, it is the result of increasing individual freedom and economic self-determination compounding benefits of free association for collective community action (See "The Two Revolutions of 1776" at [www.hawc4rc.org](http://www.hawc4rc.org)). Of course, medicine played a role within that, but the main way that government played a positive role is through the gradual development of ways in which governments can be made to constrain themselves and by which power has been decentralized. The Magna Carta and the glorious revolution of 1688 in England, then the Declaration of Independence, the American Revolution and the penning of our hallowed Constitution are some of the milestones of this transformation. These events were local, but had global consequences on people and governance. It is not by happenstance that the recent decline in life expectancy follows many decades in which economic and political power have become increasingly concentrated, individuals increasingly dependent and communities increasingly fragmented. Even before COVID struck, life expectancy in this country had been declining for three years, with the top three drivers being drug overdoses, liver disease (driven by alcohol abuse and obesity) and suicide. None of these stems from a lack of medical care, and evidence shows that they are best addressed by interventions that focus on community/fellowship, individual accountability and reliance on a higher power. One of the things that has become abundantly clear from our experience with COVID is that seemingly minor differences in health can lead to vast differences in length and quality of life. Health inequities, including food insecurity, Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and whether one has a family or a trusted community on which to rely in times of trouble are probably the most fundamental determinants of health.

The great fact is that small groups of committed individuals have been coming together to do wonderful things. Ballinger Cares is a new organization that began to organize about a year ago. They received their 501c3 nonprofit status earlier this year, and on December 16 this year they received a grant from the San Angelo Health Foundation which will allow them to purchase a building. They are in negotiations to purchase the National Guard armory in Ballinger. Currently they have a collection and resale center for clothing and home goods in the old Senior Center at 627 Strong Ave. It is open for collection and sales, Monday thru Friday 9-12 and upon request. They also distribute food once a month in the new community center. For more information call Carla Campbell @ 325-365-6049 or email [carla102@msn.com](mailto:carla102@msn.com). The mailing address is P. O. Box 802, Ballinger, TX 76821

The Health and Wellness Coalition for Runnels County (aka HAWC or HAWC4RC) also received their 501c3 nonprofit status recently, and will be one of the organizations which will have an office in the Ballinger Cares building. HAWC is already working in multiple ways to directly address the drivers of health and disease. As has been noted, community is central to thriving, and HAWC participated in the Christmas in Olde Ballinger festivities by hosting Santa Clause for pictures with the kids at Bearcat Nutrition after the parade. The plan is to make this an annual event, as a wonderful time was had by all.

You can see pictures on the Facebook page (Health And Wellness Coalition For Runnels County) and obtain health information or learn about programs and events at [www.hawc4rc.org](http://www.hawc4rc.org). Full disclosure – I have been heavily involved with HAWC, and you can find my previous articles on the website as well.

The House of Healing in Abilene is a new ministry which has recently been begun by a number of churches in Abilene in order to provide food and lodging for persons or families from the surrounding area who need temporarily to live close to Hendrick hospital, either because they have a family member who is in the hospital, or they need daily outpatient services there. These churches are working with local churches in each of the surrounding counties to build 20 small houses, each of which is, “designated and primarily purposed for one of the surrounding counties.” Each house costs \$55K to build, is 392 sq. ft. and has an area for parking, a queen-size bed, TV, kitchen and washer/dryer in addition to the usual amenities of a hotel room. There is no charge for lodging, food or transportation, as each house will be ‘adopted’ by a church in Abilene, and that congregation will be responsible for providing these things for the people staying in that house. The ministry also has contracts with local hotels/motels to provide additional capacity, and they have already utilized these contracts to provide hundreds of nights of housing. Already the construction has begun on the house for Runnels County, and the pastor of God’s Chapel in Ballinger, Joseph Buse, was present at the dedication on December 17 at which time he placed a bible for incorporation into the foundation, near the front door. God’s Chapel has contributed \$5,000, and it is hoped that 10 other churches will also contribute \$5K each, or that the churches of Runnels County will cooperate in some meaningful way so as to provide for the initial construction. Runnels and the surrounding counties are not expected to provide for the maintenance or upkeep of their respective houses, as it is anticipated that other donations to the ministry, along with the support of churches in Abilene, will be sufficient to sustain the project. You may call Brian Massey for further information at (325) 660-7719.

There are a number of other positive developments in the county, more than I have space to tell, but I will close here with this. I do wish you all Happy Hanukkah, Merry Christmas and Happy New Year, and I urge you all to remember the reasons for the seasons. I know Christ as my Lord and Savior, and I remember that Judah Macabee and his followers were able to triumph over the secularism their time, and rededicate the Temple to worship of the Holy One of Israel. I pray that we can win a bloodless battle against the secularism of our time, and return to time-honored principles of faith and charity.

Bradly Bundrant, MD, MPH