

# Times-Gazette

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## **Leaving a Legacy — Dave Bell: Wellness advocate, dedicated employee, good guy**

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David “Dave” Bell is caring, eloquent, physically active, curious by nature, and has a sense of humor. Dave is an excellent, friendly conversationalist, with the ability to hold one’s attention for prolonged periods of time, an hour passing like minutes. He is an “outdoors” person and adventuresome. Dave advocates for wellness in multiple domains, and is a member of the “wellness team” at Kingston of Ashland (KoA). When listening to Dave’s story, one is struck by the fact that he does not even come close to “fitting” ageist stereotypes about what it is like to be an older adult, thereby promoting a positive view of aging.

Dave is 79-years-old, was born in Cleveland, resides in Ashland, and is single. He was married and divorced twice. He has two sisters, a nephew, and a niece.

### **Military Service**

Dave enlisted and served in the Air Force during the Vietnam era, from 1962-1966. This was his first opportunity to observe other cultures. Using his specialized training and scientific background, he engaged in electronics repair of aircraft navigation systems. He served 18 months in North Africa, and was not ordered to serve in Vietnam or to engage in combat. Dave is a veteran, and received a Good Conduct medal. **Work Experience**

After his discharge from the Air Force, Dave was employed at the University of Washington for about 15 years as an electronics technician, a member of a contracted support team for governmental research. About 20 percent of his time was spent outside of the United States, with over 95% being in the Arctic region. Dave developed strong survival skills necessary for living in remote areas. He was engaged in multiple research projects, which became more complex and larger in scope over time. All employment was research-focused, meteorologically and/or oceanographically in nature. Dave (1) has engaged in

theoretical acoustics research, (2) served as a geographic data technician, and (3) has been involved in identifying contaminants in the ground and assessing radioactivity across the United States. Over the course of his career, he made about five trips to the Antarctic. He received an Antarctic Service Medal from the National Science Foundation for his work efforts.

When he returned to Ohio about 12 years ago, Dave was employed as a lifeguard at the local YMCA. Soon thereafter, he was employed at KoA as an Aquatics Aid and then a Wellness Aid. His efforts came to focus on wellness promotion: improving lives through exercise, aquatics, and fitness; and supporting individuals emotionally and socially along the way. He teaches wellness/exercise (“delaying the disease”) classes and water aerobics, and oversees open pool times. Wellness programming (not limited to those with specific medical diagnoses) is useful for those with physical conditions, injuries, and limitations, helping people to adapt to changes and to rehabilitate. Dave is a knowledgeable wellness advocate but is not a physician. Thus, he reminds participants to double-check with their primary care physicians about what they can and cannot do.

#### Quotes From Those Who Know Dave Well

– Christine Esson, participant of “life changer” aquatic classes for people with rheumatoid arthritis, shared that Dave is a “people person,” “transparent,” “knowledgeable,” “open-minded,” and a “good storyteller.” Class participants — community members — have benefitted from how Dave teaches, “engages everyone,” shares snippets about his life, his physical involvement in exercises, and his emotional connectedness. “You’re home” when you’re in classes with him.

– Gigi McDonnell-Oakley, MSW, LSW, Director of Social Services, KoA, shared “It has been a pleasure to work with Dave not only here at KoA, but at the Ashland YMCA. Dave has a wonderful sense of humor, and I love talking to him about his adventures and world travels. Dave is also very well-read and keeps me supplied with info on mindfulness, relaxation, and meditation. We are blessed as a community to have Dave. He is patient and kind to our staff, residents, and visitors.”

– Kristina Hickey, Wellness Director, KoA, supervisor, and friend, has known Dave and worked with him since 2006. Kristina remarked that Dave “cares about people,” “has a big heart,” is a “wonderful teacher,” and “is loved by those who attend his classes.” She believes that “he would want to be remembered as someone who really helps others to better themselves,” as reflected in the way he lives his own life. He truly cares about the health of those who attend his groups, shares his life experiences, provides individualized attention, researches routinely and extensively, and discusses what he learns. “He’s constantly looking for ways for people to improve themselves and their health.” Dave goes steps beyond what might be expected in meeting the needs and interests of participants; e.g., he made a “candlelight swim” a reality!

– Stephanie Kozak, Community Relations Director, Kingston Healthcare Co., has known Dave for 12 years, and interviewed him for a position at KoA. Stephanie noted that “Dave came to Kingston offering a wealth of wellness knowledge and expertise.” She and her family have been “blessed” with his friendship, coming to know him on a personal level. “The moment you meet Dave, you know that you have met someone special! He is a true educator in the sense that he loves to share his knowledge with everyone he touches, and always has his ears open to listen and learn! He has a helping hand out at all times and embraces life like no one I have ever known...I watch him push through his age and health challenges as if they do not exist. He is a true example of not taking every moment of your life for granted and living life to the fullest! Aging with Gracel” Education

Dave received his B.S. in General Studies from Johnson State College in Vermont in 2008, an accomplishment attained relatively late in life. He may pursue another academic degree. Challenges

Since the mid-1980's, Dave has faced health-related challenges. In 1984, he needed to have quadruple bypass surgery. This was totally unexpected since he was fit, routinely engaged in exercises and swimming, and felt well. Prior to that time, in order to be a commercial pilot, he had undergone routine stress tests and other medical procedures, ones that never revealed the existence of any problems. Subsequent surgeries (e.g., angioplasty) have been required. In 1995, he suffered his first heart attack. A second heart attack was sustained later in 1995 (November), and was another major medical event, resulting in him being

totally paralyzed and unable to open his eyes, being on a ventilator and feeding tube. During this time period, he was “aware” of what was going on around him. Dave remembers wondering if he had died and, if not, wanted to go into the light if it appeared to him. But he survived and thrived, growing stronger, refocusing on wellness, making the most of absolutely every day. More on Leaving a Unique Legacy

Interpersonal relationships, spirituality, and an overarching wellness orientation are the cornerstones to Dave’s life, promoting growth and healing. Developing strong relationships with family and friends is very important to him. Spirituality has increased in importance and is more central in his life as he has aged. Social connectedness, prayer, meditation, yoga, self-actualization, and “self-quieting” set the stage for the healing of body and mind.

Dave prides himself on being self-reliant, on being prepared for whatever comes his way, on having survival skills, and for “thinking outside of the box.”

When asked about his guiding principles and lessons learned, Dave remarked that “one should be true to self, take time to truly think about problems being faced, and make realistic decisions about dealing with them. The decision making process does not have to follow cultural/societal norms or dictates,” noting that “there is nothing that can’t be overcome.” From his perspective, learning to live a simple life is the path to living life well, having a “life worth living.” What Dave Bell most wants to be remembered for is being a “good guy,” who “could be counted on.” After spending time with Dave, and being in contact with those who know him well, it is clear-cut that he is a kind, caring man, genuinely a “good guy!” He makes a major difference in the lives of many.

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