

Housing

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According to a HUD website, the Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) program, otherwise known as Section 8, is the federal government's "primary program for assisting low-income families, the elderly and persons with disabilities to afford decent, safe and sanitary housing in the private market."

To qualify, a tenant's income has to be below a certain threshold — half the amount of the county's average income. And, by law, NEOHA awards about three-quarters of its vouchers to those with incomes one-third of the county average or below.

About 45% of Baker City households qualify for the program, according to a housing needs analysis from 2020.

NEOHA, which serves Baker, Union, Wallowa and Grant counties, pulled 131 names from the Baker County list from July 2021 to June 2022. But because the list is long — sometimes the wait can extend for several years — many people don't respond after they are contacted.

But that's not the reason most vouchers didn't get used, Myers-Nallusamy said. NEOHA still awarded 23 vouchers during that time period, which meant those recipients could look for a place where they'd like to live.

In general, through the HCV program, the tenant provides 30% of their income to rent and the voucher supplies the rest, which the local authority pays to the landlord.

But that ratio only applies if the chosen property fits within the "payment standard" — the usual price to rent a moderately-priced housing unit in the local market, as determined by the local authority.

The amount is usually based on the local Fair Market Rent price, which in 2022 is \$856 for a two-bedroom unit, according to Oregon Housing and Community Services. Tenants can still choose properties that exceed the payment standard, but the extra money has to come from their own pocket.

(The Fair Market Rent will increase by 4% in Baker County starting Oct. 1, 2022. The increases are 7% in Wal-

lowa County, and 8% in Union County, according to HUD.)

Most rents in Baker County exceed the payment standard for the HCV program, Myers-Nallusamy said.

"The rents are so much higher that they don't fall within our guidelines to be able to issue payments," she said.

Even if the tenant chooses to contribute more than 30% of their income to rent, the program doesn't allow them

to contribute more than 40%.

And units that do fit the payment standard were few and far between, Myers-Nallusamy said. Out of the 23 who received vouchers, just five could find and lease housing. The other 18 vouchers expired.

"Affordable housing is not available, and there's nothing really," Myers-Nallusamy said.

According to a 2021 assessment from the Oregon Housing Alliance, for every 100 families with extremely low

income in Baker County, only 37 units are available.

One in five renters are paying more than 50% of their income to rent.

Thera Pallis, housing navigator for NEOHA, said landlords converting properties to short-term vacation rentals has contributed to the thinning market and higher rents.

Pallis said she sometimes has to look elsewhere in the region in hopes to fill the vouchers since they are transferable to other counties.

"If I work with any clients in Baker, I'm always saying 'Are you willing to relocate if there's no success in Baker County, would you be willing to go to the other counties?'"

Some are willing, and then there's those who cannot because of their jobs," Pallis said.

"It's hard, because our job is to get people housed, and how do you do that in an area where there's just not enough housing," she said.

As part of the Baker County Behavioral Health

Housing Task Force, Pallis shared the information with nonprofit New Directions as part of a recent survey and report it conducted, which aimed to identify gaps in housing services for those with behavioral health conditions in Baker County.

New Directions recently received a \$1.4 million state grant, money it will use to purchase a modular home, two other homes in the community, and to set up a housing service center.

Blaine H. Miller

October 19, 1967 - August 13, 2022

Blaine H. Miller passed away peacefully at his family home in Anchorage, Alaska, on August 13, 2022.

Blaine was born October 19, 1967, at Walter Reed Hospital in Washington, D.C., to Mark E. Miller and Maggie/Peggy Watlic Miller of Baker City.

Blaine grew up in Baker City and always had a passion for the outdoors. Although he had been gone from Baker for many years he was a regular reader of the Baker City Herald obituaries and considered himself a "Baker Boy."

In pictures from childhood he is mostly found behind the steering wheel of something driveable, or with a baseball glove.

He graduated from Baker High School in 1986 after marrying his wife, Kim, and having their first son, Todd, in 1985.

Shortly after graduation his passion for his country led him to enlist in the United States Air Force as a security policeman. That same passion only grew and over the next 20 years he led a remarkable career. He transferred to the Alaska National Guard 176th Security Squadron in order to stay in Alaska.

He was medically retired as a Master Sergeant in 2006 after a motorcycle accident rendered him a quadriplegic. Retired and wheelchair bound, Blaine continued to do what he loved for the next 17 years in Alaska. He never let his disability dictate his life. If you did not know him from decades of running riverboats or selfless service you might have had him as your mentor at Alaska Military Youth Academy, or you could have heard him give a motivational speech at Providence Hospital. He genuinely loved to inspire and teach, to bring good to this world and it is because of that he will be missed by so many.

He is survived by his wife Kimberly; children, Todd (Hurley and Harper); Nicolas Miller (Danielle, Wyatt and Aubrey); Jordan Miller; mother, Maggie Miller (Pat); brothers Mark E. Miller, Jr. (Renea, Aaron, Cheyenne, and Cody); Troy Miller (Kathy, Austin, Alex) and other close family and friends.

He was preceded in death by his son, Brandon (Bam) Miller and his father, Mark Miller, Sr.

A service was held at the Cornerstone Church in Anchorage, Alaska on August 20, 2022. Ashes will be scattered in Alaska at a future date. This writer hopes to scatter some ashes at Mt. Hope Cemetery in Baker City, OR, where at a young age he learned to drive.



Richard 'Dick' Lee Micka

April 22, 1938 - September 11, 2022

Richard "Dick" Lee Micka was born on April 22, 1938, to Albert and Ludmila "Mildred" Micka. Mildred, affectionately known as Momma, gave birth to Dick prematurely at a house in Merrill, OR. Momma was sent home with a very sickly infant Dick in a shoebox with expectations that he wouldn't survive. Oh boy, did God have other plans for Dick. A rich, long, fulfilling life of family, faith, and friendship would follow.

Dick's parents were immigrants from then Czechoslovakia. Albert's family moved to the United States in 1906. After first joining their cousins, the Cackas, in Lamona, WA, in 1910, the entire family settled in the small Czech farming community of Malin, OR, only a year after the town was established. On a return trip to Czechoslovakia in 1927, Albert met Ludmila Kvapil. After they married in 1930, Albert brought Mildred back to Malin, where they operated a family farm. Dick was very proud of his heritage and grew up speaking Czech in the family home and on the party phone lines of the day.

The youngest of three boys, Dick always tried keeping up with older brothers, Bob and Paul. This often led to trouble, such as shooting Bob with a bow and arrow, blowing up "U-boats" in the canal, and even having an anvil dropped on Dick's head.

From his father, Dick learned his hard work ethic and from his mother a great love of family and a fondness for all tasty foods, as she was a great cook. Even as an adult, Dick was known to squirrel away secret sweets stashes.

Growing up in the tiny town of Malin, Dick attended school with the same dozen or so classmates throughout elementary and high school. Dick loved telling the story of holding the doors open so that Bob could ride his horse into the school. Pranks aside, Dick was very smart and excelled academically in all areas, including the honor band. Dick graduated valedictorian from Malin High School in 1956 and went on to attend Oregon State College (now OSU), graduating in 1960 with an elementary teaching degree and again in 1965 with a master's degree in education. While attending OSC, Dick was a member of the ROTC and would go on to serve in the Army National Guard. He was stationed at Fort Ord.

On January 20, 1964, Dick became a proud "Daddy" to his eldest daughter Christina "Christy" Louise, with his first wife, Linda. From Daddy, Christy learned a love of exploring nature. She grew up spending time with all her extended family creating close bonds with her cousins. Daddy's love of Czech heritage was passed on to Christy. One way Christy continues to pass on this heritage is by following in Momma's footsteps and baking kolaches for her family and grandchildren.

Eventually, Dick met his wife Amy (Truax) at Myrtle Creek Elementary through teaching. Upon meeting Dick, most important to Amy was if he was good enough to be the father to her toddler son, Andrew "Andy" Well, he was, and Dick and Amy married on January 11, 1980. Just as significantly, Dick adopted Andy as his son. Two years later, Dick and Amy welcomed their daughter Bethany Lynn.

Dick and Amy decided on Baker City as their permanent home for their young family and moved in 1983. Dick taught classes from third grade through middle school. Some of his other occupations included radio DJ, ranch hand, and salesman, which he definitely was not. At the age of 54, Dick and the family took a brave leap when Dick returned to college at Western Oregon University, completing the Speech Therapy degree program. It was through speech therapy for the schools that Dick found his career passion and knew he was making a difference in students' lives.

In 1987 Dick and Amy moved out of town to Old Auburn Road. The bonds between Dick and Andy were strengthened with the hundreds of miles of hiking, horseback riding, collecting sheds, shooting ground squirrels, bow hunting, and bugling in elk out Old Auburn. Teaching Andy (and Amy and eventually Bethany) to hunt and fish was a joy for Dick. One treasure is that Dick was able to take Andy's son Corwin fishing with the same cane pole Andy learned on as a boy. Being a father to Andy was the most significant impact Dick could have on Andy's life. It is something Andy carries with him throughout his life in his family, being a father to Corwin, and in his profession as

a father figure to those in need within the community.

Continuing the trend, Dick also instilled a love of the outdoors in his daughter

Bethany. From camping to rafting or simply fishing at Morgan Lake together in later years. Bethany credits her dad with passing on to her the creative gene. Growing up, Dick and Amy read to Bethany every night, sharing their love of literature with her, a passion she carries today.

Even after retiring from the Baker School District, Dick stayed involved with students by doing mountain presentations at the elementary schools and assisting Mrs. Micka's classroom field trips. Whether presenting to students or volunteering as a Trail Tender for the Oregon Trail Interpretive Center, Dick played and dressed the part from his fur hat to his hand-carved muzzleloader rifles.

It would fill a book if one were to describe Dick's hobbies. He was a man of many talents, such as wood carving and fly tying, and he could even write backward. Dick and Amy built their dream log home on French Gulch in the early 90s. In addition, Dick built his dream shop with a designated woodworking area. Dick recently completed carving and painting 16 tiny penguins for the attendees of a family reunion earlier this year.

Traveling in retirement was also a joy for Dick. He and Amy pulled their camp trailer throughout the western United States and Canada. Often Dick and Amy were able to camp, hunt and fish with his brother Bob, sister-in-law Shirley and their cousins. Dick got to catch halibut in Elfin Cove, Alaska, eat pasta in Italy and have a roast pig at a luau in Hawaii.

Dick was a football and baseball fan; as a child, his brothers assigned him the Boston Red Sox as one of his teams. He always rooted for the orange and black, his alma mater, the OSU Beavers. While teaching in Monterrey Mexico, he rooted for the Vikings as they were easiest to pronounce.

Dick's Christian faith was deeply important to him. For over 30 years, he was an active member of the Baker City Nazarene Church. Dick and Amy led Celebrate Recovery for a number of years. Dick also was involved with the Restoration program. Dick loved singing hymns, worshiping in church, studying the Bible, and praying for anyone, even if the person was a stranger.

In addition to loving to sing, Dick was musically gifted. He could play the french horn, baritone, and mellophone. Dick was a member of the Baker City Community Orchestra, and playing in the annual holiday performances brought him great happiness.

Dick was many things: son, brother, husband, father, grandfather, great-grandfather, cousin, uncle, teacher, and a friend who gave love to all. After a sudden, brief hemorrhagic stroke, Dick went to be with his heavenly father on the morning of September 11, 2022. His beloved wife Amy was able to be with him until the end here, providing him comfort and holding his hand.

Survivors include his wife, Amy Micka and son, Andy (Tara) Micka of Baker City. Daughter Christy (Gary) Richardson of Grants Pass. Daughter Bethany (Ben) Miller of La Grande. Brother Paul (Alene) Micka of Beaverton. Sister-in-law Shirley Micka of Merrill. Sister-in-law Ann Truax of Milwaukie. Brother-in-law and sister-in-law John and Maria Truax of Corvallis. Grandchildren Audrey (Tom) Reynolds of Wood River, Illinois. Matthew (Lindsey) Richardson of Grants Pass. David Richardson of Carlsbad, California, and Corwin Micka of Baker City. Great-grandchildren Paityn, Jasmine, Malachi, Mason Reynolds of Wood River, Illinois, and Brooks Richardson of Grants Pass. And numerous extended family members.

Dick was preceded in death by his parents, Albert and Mildred Micka, and brother Robert Micka.

A celebration of his life will be held on Saturday, September 24, 2022, at 11 a.m. at the Baker City Church of the Nazarene, 1250 Hughes Lane. Friends are invited to join the family for a reception in the Church Fellowship Hall following the service. Memorial contributions may be made to the Safe Families Program of the Northeast Oregon Compassion Center, Baker Relief Nursery, or the Baker City Nazarene Church in the care of Gray's West & Co. Pioneer Chapel, 1500 Dewey Ave., Baker City, Oregon 97814.

Shannon Sullivan

January 8, 1937 - September 12, 2022

Shannon Sullivan passed away on Monday, September 12, 2022, at the age of 85, with her family by her side. At Shannon's wish, her ashes will be spread in Cascade, Idaho, in a private service.

Shannon was born in Seattle, Washington to John and Marcy Kirby. She was the oldest of 4 children. When she was six her father bought a ranch and the family moved to Wingville, where she walked 3 miles to school. She lived in Baker County the rest of her life though some of her fondest memories were spending summers in Cascade with her grandparents, Ed and Marcella Davis and her aunt, Mary Cross Kerby and family.

Shannon had a variety of careers in her life. She enjoyed bookkeeping and was the bookkeeper and office manager for OK Livestock in Caldwell, ID, which was owned by her parents, John and Marcy Kirby. After the business was sold she received certification in Hypnotherapy. She provided counseling for MayDay and helped people with a variety of psychological issues from weight loss, overcoming test anxiety and changing life patterns and beliefs. In addition to counseling she started the Wild Rose School of Insurance and taught Insurance Continuing Education throughout Eastern Oregon. Shannon continued bookkeeping, for son-in-law Sam Haines's scrap metal business until she was 80.

After graduating from Baker High in 1955, Shannon attended Oregon State and Oregon. She had a love of knowledge her entire life. She later received her degree in Economics from Eastern Oregon University. She studied and read her entire life on a vast variety of subjects from physics, psychology, geology, opera, interior design, metaphysics, astrology and Shakespeare. She loved Great Courses and took classes into her 80's on Origin of the Brain, the Human Mind and Neuroscience to name a few. She was a member of a book club with friends Betty Kuhl and Leona Fleetwood, among others in the 1980s. They read "The Aquarian Conspiracy," which Shannon said was the book that had the greatest impact on her life.

Shannon was generous and outgoing. Many have received handwritten notes of encouragement, appreciation or support from her over the years. She loved giving

books to people she thought they needed to read (even if they didn't want to) and donated many books to the Baker County Library.

Good food, beauty, flowers, playing bridge, her home and the outdoors were among her favorite pleasures. Shannon enjoyed good food and cooking along with a glass of wine. Dessert was her favorite course, especially bourbon pecan ice cream. Often times it was the main course. Shannon loved the outdoors, everything from gathering cattle to gardening and sitting on the deck next to Powder

River. Anywhere she lived was filled with beautiful things, colors, especially blues and purples, and flowers. Shannon was always up for a drive to explore Eastern Oregon and beyond. Her shortcuts were legendary. Her favorite overseas trip was Ireland. St Patrick's Day always saw her in green.

If you knew Shannon long, you were laughing. She loved nothing more than telling a funny story, usually on herself, like when she left to go on a trip and ran over her suitcase, stopped the car, threw the suitcase in the trunk and kept going.

In her early 70s Shannon was dealt a bad hand and diagnosed with Parkinson's disease. Her illness was severe and she approached it with courage and determination. In order to take her mind off illness she joined a writing group with Eloise Dielman and Jessie Ritch. She wrote "Days of Travel," a lively family history. She continued working on short stories and a murder mystery.

She was preceded in death by her parents, John and Marcy Kirby, sisters Marcella Dawn Engelhardt and Judy Kirby, brother Johnny Kirby and ex-husbands Thomas Pearce and Don Sullivan.

Shannon is survived by her daughter, Marcy Haines and son-in-law Sam Haines; sister in law Jan Kirby; nieces Dawn Engelhardt, Celeste Glazer and Shannon Raquel Kirby and grand nieces and a grand nephew.

Memorial contributions can be made to the Michael J. Fox Foundation or the Baker County Library through Tami's Pine Valley Funeral Home & Cremation Services, P.O. Box 543, Halfway, OR 97834. Online condolences can be shared at www.tamispinevalleyfuneralhome.com.

