Ozark Trails

Newsletter of the Greater Ozark Chapter of YMCA Alumni
Serving Missouri, Northern Arkansas & Eastern Kansas
November 2026

Nels Bagnardi, President
Marty Rogers, Newsletter Editor

The mission of YMCA Alumni: To provide opportunities for members to Connect, Travel, and Serve while nurturing worldwide Christian fellowship.

From the President's Desk...



My wife and I just returned home from a 2 week trip to New England. While driving through the Berkshires, it reminded me of a poem from Scott Lentine, titled “New England”.

Fall is such a beautiful time of year.
There are plenty of sights to see here,
leaves with bright colors-orange, yellow and red - signalling a chance that year is near the end. But fall is also a time of new beginnings.
It’s a time to start to learn new things.
A time to look at the world in a different way.
A time to learn new strategies to handle each day.

I am excited to announce that Renee Godinez has accepted the role as Vice President of the Greater Ozark Alumni Chapter. She will be dedicated to helping us connect with members. We will be offering fun, short, local get-togethers starting in November. The goal is to host a lunch and invite members to share a meal and enjoy some of the great sites, museums, and other attractions our area has to offer.

If you have an idea or would like to be an event host, or want more information, please contact me at **njbagnardi@gmail.com**. Keep an eye open on your email of upcoming information regarding location and dates of Greater Ozark Alumni Chapter’s events.

Nels Bagnardi
President

Highlights from The Connection: National news from YMCA Alumni

- **October issue announced 4 new members of the Y Alumni Board of Directors**
- **The November issue will be in your inbox on November 2.**

It's membership renewal season! The easiest way to renew is by clicking the RECONNECT button below and renew online. Information about renewing will be mailed to you very soon, if you prefer registration information on paper.

NATIONAL SERVICE PROJECT ·YMCA Alumni·



The first National Service Project (NSP) has concluded. The celebration of the four tiny homes was September 2025 and those homes are each occupied by a single mom and her children. This summer and fall 23 volunteers made good progress on transforming the shipping containers into a Twig, a small branch, that will have program space on the main floor and living space for a Y staff member upstairs. The Twig, located in La Plant, has been turned over to the YMCA of the Seven Council Fires and will be completed by contractors.

The success and accompanying publicity of the NSP project led to a fifth home being funded by a donor and built by many of the same volunteers this summer and fall.

Watch for news about the next NSP !

The links below will take you to the websites shown.

YMCA Alumni

YMCA Alumni Travel Club

Events & Chapter Resources

YMCA Alumni Facebook

Reconnect & Renew Membership

Join Us - New memberships

REGISTRATION IS NOW OPEN!

The Central Region of YMCA Alumni is planning a national gathering in Kansas City June 16 - 19, 2027. Great food, speakers, fellowship, and tours are on tap. Our base will be at Embassy Suites near KCI. As the host chapter we are encouraging everyone to attend. These events only happen every three years - only once a decade in the Midwest - so this is a special opportunity for us.

The planning committee is Craig Altschul (The Connection editor), Bob Cook (Go Travel), Dave Rogers, chair (Ozark), Denny Mohrman (Messer-Brandeburg), Sue Smith (Chambers), Orville Lindquist (Upper Midwest), and Judy Bagnardi (Ozark), Renee Godinez (Ozark), Phill Morgan (Y Alumni President)

DETAILS AND REGISTRATION HERE

EAF Update November 2026

The Emergency Assistance Fund, a.k.a. EAF, gives grants to current YMCA employees and current YMCA Chapter Alumni who are experiencing financial hardships. This is funded thru financial gifts of Y employees and active chapter alumni like you! Greater Ozark Chapter members have generously given to EAF in years past and we hope to continue with your generous support.

Go online to **ymcaeaf.org**
OR
Send a check to:
YMCA Emergency Assistance Fund
c/o YMCA of the USA
PO Box 7411037
Chicago IL 60674-11037

When giving online select AYR Ozark as your Y Alumni Chapter, or if writing a check, indicate Greater Ozark Chapter on the memo line.

We thank you in advance for helping our fellow Y employees, past and present! Should you have any questions, please feel free to contact Bruce Wands, the EAF chair for the Greater Ozark Chapter, at 816 616-6503 (call or text) or email **bbklwands@gmail.com**. Thank you!



Jonathan Vance
Alena Wenker
Kim Decker

A World of Opportunity: International Service Corps Update

From the Czech Republic to communities around the world, ISC creates opportunities for YMCA Alumni members to share their experience, talents, and passion while building lasting friendships.

Alena Wenker is from the Czech Republic. She spent over 30 years in the United States working for the YMCA and teaching Russian at a university in Middle Tennessee. After retiring, Alena became involved with the YMCA Alumni International Service Corps (ISC).

She connected with the YMCA in the Czech Republic and helped establish a relationship in the small, picturesque town of Starý Plzenec, where the YMCA hosts a day camp and welcomes volunteers to serve as counselors.

Through Alena's leadership, ISC has sent three volunteers over the past two years to help children learn English through immersion in fun, engaging daily activities conducted entirely in English.

This year, Jon Vance and Kim Decker joined Alena in Starý Plzenec, spending a week as counselors at the day camp. For Kim, returning for a second year made the experience special: Here's what she said:

"Returning to Starý Plzenec for my second year was especially meaningful because I was no longer a stranger—I was returning to friends, familiar faces, and campers who remembered me. I loved watching the children grow in confidence, not only in their English, but in their willingness to try, help one another, and step outside their comfort zones. Being back at camp also reminded me how much I love working with children and creating experiences that bring people together. I came to share my love of camp and English, but I left feeling that the Czech campers and leaders had given me just as much in return."

This is what the International Service Corps is all about: *sharing our skills and experience while learning from others and building relationships that reach across borders.*

Our ISC 2026 Support Campaign is underway through November 30, 2026.
Your financial support helps ISC make experiences like the one in the Czech Republic possible. We hope you will contribute soon. Click here to donate: **ymcaalumni.org/donate**

Greater Ozark Chapter News

Save the Date!



Our Chapter has planned a 24-hour get-together at YMCA Trout Lodge & Camp Lakewood, (located west of Potosi, Missouri) for Friday, April 9, 2027 through Saturday, April 10th. The event will include a tour of the facility, a bit of volunteer work, and some program participation. The all inclusive rate of $60 per person will include a guest room in Trout Lodge, and four meals (lunch Friday through lunch Saturday). Registration information will be included in our Spring 2027 newsletter. Here is a link to their website: **YMCA Trout Lodge | Gateway Region YMCA**

Meet Renee Godinez, new V-P for Greater Ozark Chapter



While a native of St. Louis, I have also lived in Texas, Massachusetts, New York and Indiana while raising our two children. I also spent ten years overseas in France, Belgium, Venezuela and Brazil. Upon returning to the US, I was finally able to start a professional career.

In 2000 I began working at YMCA of the Ozarks - Trout Lodge & Camp Lakewood performing administrative duties for the Executive Director as well as overseeing all our fundraising initiatives. The fundraising quickly became my sole focus and I transitioned into the role of Director of Philanthropy. With my foreign background and language skills, I was involved with the Y's international connections and led student groups to Belize and Brazil. I also qualified for my CFRE (Certified Fundraising Executive) certification and my Senior Director accreditation.

I retired in 2020 after significantly increasing our annual campaign revenue, Lamplighter Society membership, golf tournament participation and two capital campaigns. Some of my best friends now are my former co-workers at the Y. We keep in touch and share lunches, dinners and family milestones together.

Since retirement, I have had two post-retirement jobs, one of which included going back to the Y for a consulting stint. So, I've literally retired three times. I've also served on the Boards of our Chamber of Commerce, Enhancements Sheltered Workshop, Great Mines Health Center and our Senior Citizen Tax Fund. I am participating in a grassroots initiative to spark a local tourism undertaking to culminate in a full board and tax revenue. In my spare time, I make homemade wine.

And now, I'm pleased to serve as the VP for our Ozarks Region YMCA Alumni. The Y is still in my blood. Gotta keep busy and stay active!



Judy & Nels with daughter

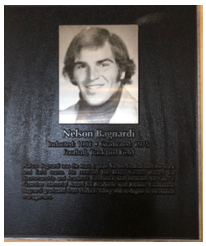
Nels & Judy Bagnardi: The Bagnardi's recently returned from a 2-week trip to the East Coast and New England areas. Our first stop was the Flight 93 Memorial near Shanksville, PA. What a moving experience! Then we spent 2 days in Gettysburg, touring the museum, followed by a 2 hour bus tour throughout various battlegrounds. Did you know that Gettysburg has over 1,600 monuments and statutes scattered throughout the village? Then it was onto Annapolis for the football game between the Naval Academy and Tulsa. Navy pulled out a win during the last few minutes- very exciting!

We then travelled to Great Barrington, MA to spend the week with our daughter. On the way there, we stopped at the FDR Presidential Library in Hyde Park, NY. New England in the fall is absolutely beautiful, nothing compares to the colors we experienced there -magical. We went apple picking and ate many, many delicious meals - this is a foodie's paradise. We then headed to the Capital District of New York and spent time with Nels' family. While there, we visited Nels' alma mater-Hudson Valley C.C., where he had been inducted into the athletic Hall of Fame. Judy had never seen his plaque, so she finally got to see it! His father, Joe, turned 98 while we were there. It's always good to see the family.



Fall in Stockbridge, Mass

Nels' Hall of Fame plaque at Hudson Valley C.C.



Nels & Judy at Navy game





Les at Fallingwater

Les Boone: I just returned from a driving trip to my home state of Pennsylvania! I met my cousin Bernie Carlson & his wife Betsy at Falling Water & Kentuck Knob two of Frank Lloyd Wright's masterpieces! We also visited the Flight 93 Memorial & Fort Necessity National Battlefield!



Les and cousins at Fallingwater

Dave & Marty Rogers: We enjoyed connecting with family, long time friends, and Y Alumni friends on several trips this summer and fall. Dave was in a community Theatre production of *Arsenic and Old Lace in August*.



Age of Steam Museum with Chambers Chapter in Ohio



With Bruce & Karron at Mott Chapter



Arsenic & Old Lace

Dick and Jani Flynn:



We are still surviving the hot days of summer in Lawrence, KS and it is the middle of October. Since the last newsletter we have celebrated a college graduation and a wedding of a granddaughter, who is now doing her Pediatric residency in Brooklyn NY. Our youngest granddaughter spent the summer playing lacrosse at tournaments out East. As of September she has committed to play in college for Northwestern!

Our granddaughter and her husband who were living in Slovakia for three years moved this July to the company's office in Munich, Germany.

Dick and I have been keeping busy going to the fitness center every day, watching all the St Louis Cardinal games, and enjoying spending time with our family.



Mary Reid & Butch Michaels:

Mary is busy with volunteer activties including Assistance League Thrift Shop with Big Christmas Caravan Fundraiser, and houses decorated for Christmas, P.E.O., and YMCA exercise classes three times per week.

Butch is starting his fourth year of 55+ active living at Avidor about 5 minutes from Mary. He enjoys playing pool, cards, Happy Hour twice a week, exercise faculties, the hot tub for year-round usage and an outdoor pool. He has done a house remodel for a repeat couple and a big basement restoration from flooding that hit Omaha in early October.

Two first-time great grand babies for Mary and three for Butch have added new excitement to our older years. Both sing in their church choirs and attend Bible Study classes.

Bruce & Karon Wands:



After several years of cancelling out of chapter gatherings, we were able to attend the Mott gathering in Des Moines less than three hours from home. And our daughter was able to drive us there. We are becoming more dependent on others for so many things we never gave a second thought of doing/taking!!!

In February of this year we were blessed with our first great grandchild, Oliver Russell Diane. He is a fourth generation redhead! Yes, Bruce used to have hair to show it!



Great Grandmother Karron & Ollie



Dinner in West Des Moines with the Mott Chapter

Kim & Debra Phillips:

Back to Branson! Debbie and Kim Phillips returned to Branson with family this summer and Debbie caught this "certified" trophy 20+ inches rainbow!





Bill & Mary Ching: Mary has spent the last two months in hospitals or a rehab facility. Mary is facing several issues, mainly that her blood pressure is very erratic. The doctors had some success in regulating her blood pressure. She is also waiting for the beginning of next year when she can have her back fixed for three discs that need some spacing material inserted. I call it concrete as that is what fixed my back about 8 years ago. The wait is because she had her heart operated on in July and the Dr. says “no back surgery until at least 6 months” after the heart was fixed.

I’m doing fine and had time for some gardening and canned 20 jars of salsa to use and mostly give away. My cousin in SD sends me a pint of honey as part of his honey harvest each year and I send him a pint of salsa.

Just a reminder: renew your YMCA Alumni membership for 2027.



In Hawaii



Celebrating Charley’s birthday with family in Nashville

Debbie & Charley Redmond: It has been a busy summer and truly an enjoyable one too. Our third son spent a few weeks working on replacing the floor in the basement and finishing the bedroom and closet down there. Travel started with a trip to Nashville, Tennessee to visit Niece and her family for the 4th of July where we were joined by our third son with his family to include two grandsons.

Charley and Debbie helped with hot dog sales at the Carondelet Park Rec Complex outdoor pool and helped with the annual Carondelet Y Service Club Rubber Duck Race.

By September, there were grandson soccer games intermingled with Debbie’s trip to New Orleans for the YMCA General Assembly. She had nominated a man to the National YMCA Hall of Fame who served the YMCA and Y’s Men as a volunteer for many years (Henry Grimes). The induction ceremony was held during the Assembly.

Upon returning home and repacking, Charley and Debbie took a trip to San Francisco to visit our second son to explore and experience riding in a driverless car. Then on to Honolulu, Hawaii for a Y Service Club 100th Anniversary celebration and some down time together on Oahu. More soccer games, band concerts, and family dinners are in our future.



Kari Lenz: Kari always had a passion for serving others, a value that has guided both her personal and professional journey. Her passion for seniors began early, growing up watching her dad's business provide mobile X-ray services to nursing homes throughout the St. Louis area.

Kari earned her bachelor's degree in Psychology and Sociology from Maryville University and spent the first 16 years of her career with the YMCA. Those years helped shape her love of community, leadership, and serving others—values that continue to influence her work today.

In 2012, Kari followed her growing passion for seniors into the senior living industry. Kari went on to spend more than 13 years leading Assisted Living and Memory Care communities throughout St. Louis. As a Certified Senior Advisor, Licensed Nursing Home Administrator, and Certified Dementia Practitioner, she now uses her experience to help seniors and their families navigate the many choices involved in aging—whether that means finding the right senior living community or discovering ways to safely remain at home.

Service continues to be an important part of Kari's life outside of her professional work. She is an active member of the Crestwood Sunset Hills Rotary Club, where she enjoys giving back to her community, building meaningful connections, and working alongside others who share her passion for service. Her involvement with Rotary is a natural extension of the values she developed during her YMCA years.

Kari lives in St. Louis with her husband, Dave. They recently celebrated 30 years of marriage and enjoy filling their lives with travel, adventure, and plenty of time with their two dogs. Whether she is serving seniors, giving back through Rotary, traveling with her husband, or simply enjoying time with family and friends, Kari believes life is about making meaningful connections, finding joy along the way, and helping others find what brings them joy.



Kari & Dave at YMCA Lamplighter Dinner



Dick & Naomi Hundley



We have been blessed to be able to see all our kids during the year. They are scattered from Connecticut to Alabama to Missouri, so it's a treat to be able to see them as well as their children and grandchildren! Daughter, Beth and Gary came down in September to help us celebrate our 65th wedding anniversary. We have had so many blessings! We look forward to going to Missouri for Thanksgiving and Christmas again this year to spend the holidays with the grandchildren and great grands. We also hope to visit with some of our good friends from Y Alumni while we are there.

Meanwhile, we still spend a lot of time related to church activities and exercise when we can at the YMCA. We hope to see all of you in 2027.



Sunset in port of Bermuda

Karen Anderson: Karen continues to babysit two grandchildren under 3 for 3-4 days per week out of town so her daughter can teach seminary students Intro to New Testament and Greek I. She lives half of her week in Wylie and the other half at home in Grand Prairie. She is studying Colossians and Genesis this school year in Community Bible Study and taking the grand kids to CBS.

For spring break, Karen flew to Orlando to visit Jesus Film Project missionary friends and family, explore lovely Leu Garden, and view the moon launch up close from a friend's backyard.

In the summer she flew to Boston and took a cruise from Boston to Halifax, NS and Bermuda Naval Shipyard. She learned that the Bermuda triangle is Halifax to Boston to Bermuda. The Halifax Citadel has a website of all their archived WWI photos. If you have relatives who fought in that war for Canada, you can see what photos they have. Bermuda food is so expensive that a mom of an intern at the Naval shipyard museum brought in a suitcase and cooler of frozen food for the student interns. When Boston runs out of space, they add dirt to the ocean side to increase its landmass. An island off their coast was a former dump. They sued for clean-up and now the former dump is now one of the most visited parks in the city. No longer does it smell like the trash that used to blow into it. Now people want to live there.



Ship in port of Boston



Karen with a Crayola at the Crayola factory



With Sister-in-law Denise in Orlando

Charlie Lord: I'll bet everyone remembers these "good old days" with our pre-historic tools for fitness testing! This is our downtown Little Rock Y Fitness Director - Chris - giving yours truly the "once over" only 40 years ago at the Downtown Y! It's amazing how little I've aged since 1986 don't you think?

I'd also like to thank everyone for putting up with my book promotion talk and information. It was the "Book of the Day" September 15 th and did great in sales, attention, questions and promotion! Thanks to everyone for putting up with my book and me! Thank You Marty and the Ozark group for your support!



Remember to renew your membership!