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WORLD WAR II



Edward W. Mull's Purple Heart. He received it while serving in WWII.

A FOOT SOLDIER

99-year-old veteran vividly recalls combat

By Ron Devlin
rdevlin@readingeagle.com
@rondevlinre on Twitter

On a cold January morning in 1945, Staff Sgt. Edward W. Mull measured each step carefully as he crossed a snow-covered field somewhere in Belgium.

Land mines, among the foot soldiers' most dreaded hazards, lay concealed beneath winter's crisp white blanket.

Despite knowing it had been mined, a young lieutenant ordered Mull's platoon onto the battlefield in a critical operation during the Battle of the Bulge.

"Seven mines went off," recalls Mull. "Twenty-two men were injured and three killed, including the officer who gave the order."

Mull was one of the wounded, and the shrapnel embedded in his left ankle provides a constant reminder of that fateful day during World War II.

Mull, who turned 99 Thursday and

Incensed by the loss, Mull's unit advanced in search of the German machine gun crew.... Ironically, instead of death, Mull's unit found life in that isolated farmhouse.

"When we arrived," Mull recalls, "the 18-year-old farmer's daughter had just given birth to a baby boy."

whose family will celebrate the birthday Saturday, recalled the incident during a recent phone conversation from his Bern Township home.

Though afflicted with mesothelioma, a cancer caused by exposure to asbestos, Mull remains in good spirits and has vivid memories of wartime

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Edward Mull during basic training at Camp Forest in Tennessee in 1942.

COURTESY OF EDWARD MULL



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Soldier

FROM PAGE C1

experiences that happened more than 75 years ago.

"My father remembers so much about World War II. It's amazing," said Barbara Miller, with whom he resides. "He remembers the names of the guys in his unit, the weapons they used and the ammo they carried."

Until illness and death narrowed their numbers, Mull would regularly attend reunions at an Army buddy's home in Emmaus, Lehigh County.

As the only remaining member of that exclusive club, Mull's memories are the last vestiges of a handful of young men who rose to their country's defense at a critical moment in history.

Answering Uncle Sam

Remembering Presidents Franklin D. Roosevelt's dictum that young men who enlisted early could choose their branch of the armed services, Mull thought he was destined to wear an Army Air Corps uniform when he signed up in June 1942.

"When I landed in Camp Forest in Tullahoma, Tenn., I didn't see any airplanes around," Mull recalls with a chuckle. "Instead of the Air Corps, I ended up in the 80th Infantry Division."

A student in the school of hard knocks, Mull took the disappointment pretty much in stride.

He'd spent much of his childhood at Bethany Children's Home near Womelsdorf.

After graduating from Womelsdorf High School, he'd worked in the Civilian Conservation Corps, a Depression-era public works program, building earthen dams and fighting fires in Glacier National Park.

Just prior to enlisting, he worked at the beryllium plant in Muhlenberg Township. His job was to bust ore rocks with a sledge hammer and toss them into a vat of acid.



Edward W. Mull with his daughter, Barbara Miller, in their Bern Township residence.

BEN HASTY — READING EAGLE

On Feb. 2, 1946, Mull and Ruth Weand joined hands in wedlock at her parents home in Reading. They were engaged before he left for the service. They decided to wait to tie the knot because, as Mull puts it, "you never know what can happen in war. She waited nearly four years for me," Mull recalls, emotion in his voice.



Mull

premonition fulfilled. "It was so sad," Mull said. "He was such a good soldier."

Incensed by the loss, Mull's unit advanced in search of the German machine gun crew.

The Germans were nowhere to be found when Mull's unit reached the farmhouse the enemy soldiers used as a fortress. Ironically, instead of death, Mull's unit found life in that isolated farmhouse.

"When we arrived," Mull recalls, "the 18-year-old farmer's daughter had just given birth to a baby boy."

Purple Heart, postwar

Following the tragic incident in the minefield, Mull

SOLDIER » PAGE C3

That down-to-earth civilian experience would pay off on the battlefields of Europe, where he would rise from private to sergeant and witness events unimaginable to a 20-something from Berks County.

Death and life

One somewhat eerie inci-

dent, in particular, remains permanently etched in his consciousness.

The night before his unit was to go into battle somewhere in France, Mull and others noticed that one soldier had a strangely calm aura about him.

Hyman, a Jewish boy from Washington washed

and shaved as if he were about to go on leave. He sat down and wrote four letters home.

What's going on, Mull and others wondered.

"He told us, 'I'm going to die tomorrow,'" Mull recalls. "We all tried to talk him out of it, but he had his mind made up."

At 10 a.m. the next morning, Mull says, Hyman fell victim to a volley from a German machine gun nest. Mull still remembers the bullets whizzing over his head, then turning to see that the young soldier's

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Soldier

FROM PAGE C2

was taken to a field hospital.

There were so many wounded, Mull lay unattended for 17 hours.

"I remember the blood running down my ankle when they took off my boot," recalled Mull, who was awarded a Purple Heart.

By train, he would go to a hospital in Paris. Then, as was Army policy, to England for convalescence.

When he rejoined his unit, none of his former comrades were there. They'd all been killed or wounded.

"I was the only original member left," he recalls. "The new men in the unit were all strangers to me."

After the war ended in Europe on May 7, 1945, Mull's unit was assigned to an installation in Kempton, Germany.

He knew enough Pennsylvania Dutch to communicate with German civilians. He was particularly fond of one family, from whom he gained insight into life in Germany under Adolf Hitler.

"They were not members of the Nazi Party," he said. "They told me that if you were a member of the party you got real food, and if you weren't you got powdered food."

The family lived in fear of the Nazi SS, whose members could commandeer their home at will, he said.

In fall 1945, more than three years after Mull had enlisted, he was ordered stateside.

Thing was, there was a maritime strike and Mull spent a month in France awaiting a ship home.

The voyage across the Atlantic Ocean aboard a Liberty ship turned out to be as scary, maybe more, than combat.

"We hit a hell of a storm," Mull recalls. "We were up in the air, then down below the waves. We were all scared."



Mull's Bronze Star.

She waited for him

On Feb. 2, 1946, Mull and Ruth Weand joined hands in wedlock at her parents home in Reading.

They were engaged before he left for the service. They decided to wait to tie the knot because, as Mull puts it, "you never know what can happen in war."

"She waited nearly four years for me," Mull recalls, emotion in his voice.

They went housekeeping in the 1000 block of North 12th Street in Reading, where they lived for more than 50 years.

Mull worked a route for Bond bakery before getting a job as an electrician with the Reading Railroad. He worked in the Reading shops and other railroad

operations for 20 years.

The Mulls would have two children, Barbara and the late William Mull. Ruth passed in 2009.

In the years after the war, Mull tried to write a memoir. Amid the demands of work and the responsibilities of raising a family he never finished it.

About 10 years ago, Mull told his story to a journalist who videotaped the interview and sent a copy to the Library of Congress.

Breakfast with Poppy

Regularly on Fridays, a grandfather-and-grandson reunion takes place at Crossroads Family Restaurant in Muhlenberg Township.

Coming off the night



Mull during basic trainin

"My grandfather's never at a loss for words."

— Greg Mull

cheesesteak omelette with sauce and white toast.

The chatter ranges from old war stories to Ed's favorite TV program, The History Channel's "Ancient Aliens." Oh, and the latest plight of his favorite team, the Philadelphia Phillies.

"My grandfather's never at a loss for words," Greg confides.

For Greg, 46, the weekly get-together is about more than war stories and baseball talk. His father William, Ed's son, died young and unexpectedly. Greg

also lost his wife at a young age.

"I had no time to say goodbye to them," Gregory Mull says. "With Poppy, I have this time to talk, and ask any questions I want."

Decked out in a baseball hat emblazoned with "Purple Heart, WW II," Ed is accorded celebrity status at the restaurant.

"People come up to him and say thank you for your service," Greg said. "Recently, a total stranger came to our table and picked up our check."

i am
just getting started

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...to be continued

BERN TOWNSHIP

At long last, WWII veterans meet

Both were from Berks County, served in the same division and lived only miles apart.

By Ron Devlin
rdevlin@readingeagle.com
@rondevlinre on Twitter

They both grew up in Berks County, crossed the Atlantic Ocean on the same voyage of the Queen Mary and saw action in Normandy and the Battle of the Bulge during World War II.

And though they live only seven miles apart in Bern Township, it took 99 years for Edward W. Mull and Norman Reifsnyder to meet face-to-face.

That auspicious occasion took place Monday when the old soldiers, both 99, sat down for a two-hour chat at Mull's house.

"You and I were in the same division, you live in my backyard and we've never met," mused Reifsnyder. "My goodness."

When Mull was featured in a recent Reading Eagle story, Reifsnyder was amazed to discover that a WWII comrade lived close by.

Subsequently, their daughters — Barbara Mull Miller and Rebecca Reifsnyder Schmidt — arranged the long overdue meeting.

"This is a great reunion of two people who never knew each other but have so much in common," said Schmidt, who lives in North Carolina.

Seated at a dining room table, Mull and Reifsnyder traded war stories, looked at WWII photo albums and reflected on their service in a war that ended 75 years ago last month.

Both men served in separate regiments of the Army's 80th Infantry Division — Mull in the 318th and Reifsnyder in the 319th.



World War II veterans, both 99 years old, meet for the first time in Bern Township. Edward W. Mull, left, served in the 318th Infantry Regiment. Norman Reifsnyder served in the 319th. They live only miles apart, but it took 99 years for them to meet in person.

At various times their units served under the overall campaign of Gen. George S. Patton in the European Theater.

"Yep, old blood and guts," remarked Reifsnyder, who saw Patton close-up once or twice.

Both former GIs had remarkably clear memories of a time when they were 20-somethings and the world was at war.

Both staff sergeants, they brought maps of their reg-

imental campaigns, which they referred to in recalling operations in France, Belgium and Germany.

Remembering war

It was a moonlight night when Reifsnyder's unit landed in Normandy about two months after D-Day, June 6, 1944.

A clean-up operation, the unit's mission was to secure French towns vacated by German units.

"I remember entering Or-

leans," Reifsnyder recalled. "There was a statue of Joan of Arc, the Maid of Orleans, in the town square."

Not all of his experiences were as pleasant, recalled Reifsnyder, a radio operator trained in Morse code. Dodging mortar fire, snipers and German artillery shells had its tense moments.

One artillery shell landed so close during the Battle of the Bulge, it blew the tires off Reifsnyder's jeep. An-

other time, a room he was supposed to occupy collapsed and another soldier was severely injured.

On Christmas Eve 1944, U.S. artillery called in by Reifsnyder took out a German tank unit. He still remembers the badly burned German soldiers.

"War," Reifsnyder said, "is hell."

While Reifsnyder escaped injury, Mull wasn't as fortunate.

Crossing a minefield dur-

ing the Battle of the Bulge, several landmines exploded. Three men in his unit were killed and Mull was among 22 injured.

He lay unattended for 17 hours in a field hospital with a wound to his lower leg. He recovered, but still carries shards of shrapnel in his ankle.

One of Mull's most vivid memories is of a young soldier's premonition of death.

The night before combat, the soldier washed and shaved and wrote letters home. When his buddies queried, he said "I'm going to die tomorrow."

At 10 a.m. the next morning, Mull recalled, the premonition came true.

Old soldiers bond

It was as if Mull and Reifsnyder had known each other all their lives.

Within minutes, the old soldiers were chewing the fat like old buddies. After all, they both rose through the ranks to become staff sergeants.

Indeed, their life paths were similar.

After the war, they came home, got married and raised families.

Mull went to work for the Reading Railroad. Reifsnyder ran a dairy farm until Blue Marsh Lake put him out of business. After that, he formed a landscaping business.

They agreed, as most wartime survivors do, that somebody up there was watching over them.

After two hours of telling war stories and paging through photo albums, they reflected on their wartime experience over generous portions of Barbara Miller's shoofly cake.

Reifsnyder, who wore his World War II Eisenhower jacket, put his arm around Mull's shoulders and looked him in the eye.

"What an experience we had," said Reifsnyder. "And we didn't know it."

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New book recalls Berks brothers killed in World War II



COURTESY - KEVIN M. CALLAHAN

Clair Leibensperger (left) and friend Raymond Hauze in uniform during World War II. Clair was wounded but survived the war. His brother, Russell, and identical twin, Stewart, did not survive the war. They're buried in Netherlands American Cemetery in The Netherlands. The Leibenspergers are included in "Brothers In Arms," a new book by Kevin M. Callahan.



Russell and Stewart Leibensperger, Berks County brothers who died in World War II, are buried side-by-side at Netherlands American Cemetery in The Netherlands.

Stewart and Russell Leibensperger died within six weeks of each other.

By Ron Devlin
rdevlin@readingeagle.com
@rondevlinre on Twitter

If losing a son in war is devastating, the pain of losing two must be unimaginable.

George and Ruth Leibensperger of Ontonagon Township experienced that incredible sense of loss during World War II.

Their sons, Stewart and Russell, died while serving with the Army in Europe in 1944.

Stewart Leibensperger died when his unit, the

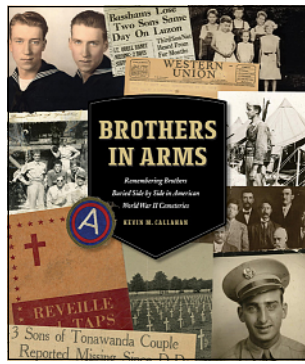
318th Infantry Regiment, was headed for battle in Germany's Saar Valley on Nov. 16, 1944. A wall he was using as shelter collapsed on him.

His older brother, Russell Leibensperger, a tail gunner on a B-26 Marauder, died when the bomber went down over St. Vith, Belgium, on the day after Christmas 1944. He was on his 63rd bombing mission with the 323rd Bomber Group of the Army Air Corps.

"All I can tell you is that my grandmother cried a lot," says Diane Leibensperger Wolfe of Shoemakersville, niece of the two fallen soldiers.

Indeed, Wolfe's father, Clair Leibensperger, was recovering from wounds in an Army hospital in England when Stewart, his identical twin brother, lost his life.

"My father knew when his twin brother was killed,"



recalls Wolfe, a retired hairdresser. "He always said he felt something at that moment."

The story of the Leibensperger brothers is retold in a new book, "Brothers In Arms," by Kevin M. Callahan, a Connecticut historian.

In the book, Callahan documents the stories of 72 sets of brothers who died in World War II. All but five sets are buried in American cemeteries in Europe.

The others are buried in Tunisia and the Philippines.

The Leibensperger brothers are buried side-by-side in Netherlands American Cemetery near Margarten, The Netherlands.

Callahan, 51, who took a sabbatical in 2018 to write the book, was inspired by a tour of Europe he made after graduating from Yale University about 30 years ago.

"At a cemetery in Normandy," he recalls, "I realized that the reason I could travel was due to their sac-

rifices."

Callahan not only documented the soldiers' stories, he sought out descendants in 35 states and Canada, including the Leibensperger family. Betty Leibensperger Crow, 93, of Leesport, younger sister of the Leibensperger boys, was one of those interviewed.

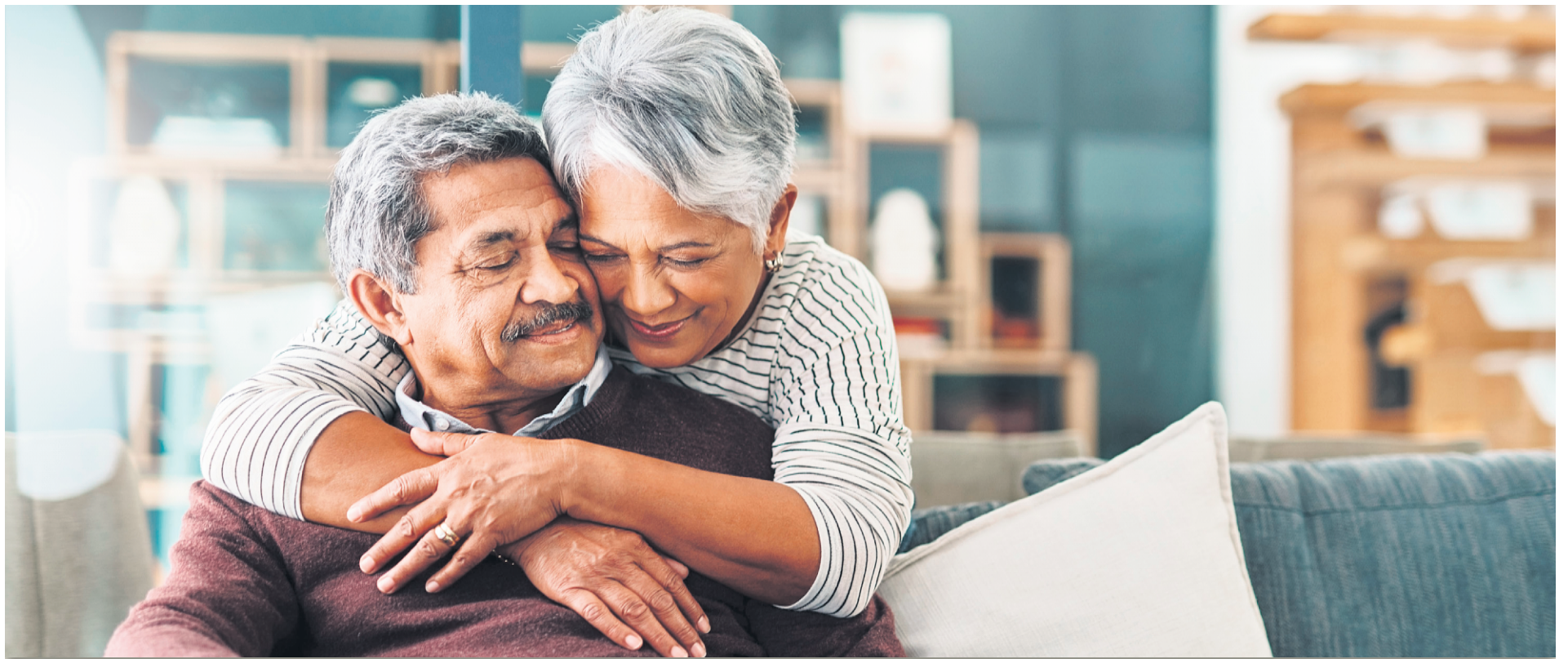
Clair Leibensperger survived the war, but limped for the rest of his life due to his wounds. He lived in Leesport and worked as a painter at Standard Auto

Body.

Though he never got to visit their graves, Callahan notes in the book, Clair cherished a small black-and-white photo of his brothers' gravesites taken by a Dutch family on Memorial Day 1959.

"If Clair could not visit the cemetery," Callahan writes, "it was some comfort to have someone who could share that experience with him."

"Brothers In Arms" is available on amazon.com.



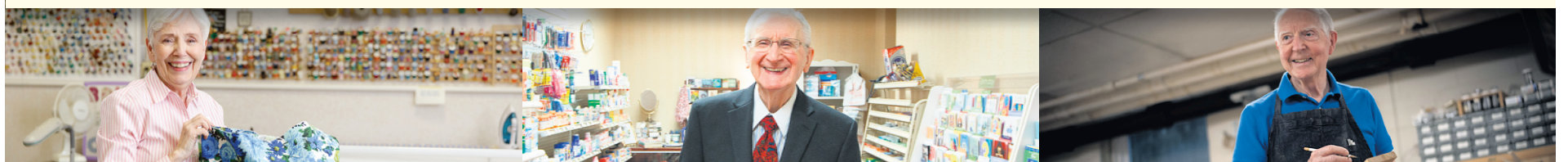
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Courtesy - Kevin M. Callahan

MEDICARE

Counselors offer free Medicare advice by phone

RSVP

The Medicare open enrollment period is in high gear, and state-trained volunteers throughout the region are helping seniors to navigate the complex system. Under a federally funded program known in Pennsylvania as APPRISE, these counselors assist both new Medicare beneficiaries and current participants.

In Montgomery County, a cadre of 30 APPRISE advisors has switched mainly to telephone consultations because of the pandemic. In previous years, they often met seniors face-to-face at sites throughout the county.

"It's a lot more difficult because we're not sharing a computer with a beneficiary at our side, looking at the same thing at the same time," said Nancy Morris, an APPRISE counselor for seven years.

During the Medicare open enrollment period, which ends on Dec. 7, seniors using original Medicare, which includes separate health and drug components, have the opportunity to switch drug plans. Those using Medicare Advantage, the alternate approach that covers both health care and drugs, can change providers. And seniors can decide to change from original Medicare to Medicare Advantage.

"Just today I spoke to an 83-year-old who was paying a lot of money for his Medicare Supplement Plan," Morris said. "I was able to help him find a company that he could switch to and save about \$150 per month."



Nancy Morris

"Just today I spoke to an 83-year-old who was paying a lot of money for his Medicare Supplement Plan," Morris said. "I was able to help him find a company that he could switch to and save about \$150 per month."

— Nancy Morris

How things have changed

"We've changed how we counsel this year," said Douglas Keene, APPRISE coordinator for RSVP, which administers the program in Montgom-

ery County. "More than 90 percent of our sessions are by phone, although we can share screens using Zoom. It comes in handy if you want to show the beneficiaries the Medicare.gov website. They can review their prescription plans or Advantage plans to see if anything has changed from the previous year."

That process is often more difficult over the phone.

"It can be hard to explain without the senior seeing the information," said seven-year veteran APPRISE counselor Amy Kokoles. "We need to enter their prescriptions in Medicare.gov, so we often ask them to email the information to us. If that's too difficult they can call us with their prescription names and dosages."

Most of the seniors she helps live in Norristown and surrounding communities.

"So far, there haven't been as many calls as I expected," she said. "It will pick up as we get closer to the Dec. 7 deadline. Please give us enough time to help you!"

Morris said she's been pretty busy handling calls from her Montgomeryville-area client base and the APPRISE general hotline.

"Some people aren't very computer literate," she said. "I have to do the research and mail or email them the results. It takes a lot more time to explain things and describe options over the phone."

Keene noted several changes in Medicare for 2021.



Amy Kokoles

"So far, there haven't been as many calls as I expected," she said. "It will pick up as we get closer to the Dec. 7 deadline. Please give us enough time to help you!"

— Amy Kokoles

"Some of the Medicare prescription drug plans and Medicare Advantage plans now offer insulin, which can be very expensive, with a \$35 per month copay limit," he said.

Plans are now required to enroll seniors with end-stage renal disease, he added. For original Medicare, the annual premiums and deductibles have increased somewhat, as they have for some Medicare Advantage plans and original Medicare supplemental and drug plans.

Help is available

APPRISE counselors help Medicare recipients to review their plans. But they also help those about to turn 65 and older to enroll for the first time in Medicare.

"Many of our callers are looking for advice," Keene said. "People are retiring later and later. The full retirement age for Social Security isn't until 66. A lot of people aren't ready to retire and are still getting medical benefits from their employer. Whether they are retired, ready to retire or planning for the future, we can help them understand Medicare."

A key decision is whether to enroll in original Medicare with a supplement (Medigap) plan and a Part D Drug Plan, or whether to enroll in a comprehensive Medicare Advantage plan.

"With original Medicare

FOR MORE INFORMATION

To reach an APPRISE counselor, call:

- Bucks County, 267-880-5700
- Chester County, 610-344-5004
- Delaware County, 484-494-3769
- Montgomery County, 610-834-1040, ext. 120

RSVP's APPRISE web page (www.rsvpmc.org/medicare-help) contains links to many Medicare resources, including:

- Medicare 101, the basics
- How to enroll in Medicare
- A calendar of online Medicare information presentations
- A detailed list of 2021 Medicare Advantage plans
- A detailed list of 2021 prescription drug plans
- Links to many other resources

and a supplement plan, you have a better sense of what your out-of-pocket expenses will be, and you can go to any provider who accepts Medicare," Keene said. "With Medicare Advantage, because of deductibles and co-pays, your health care expenses for the year become more of an unknown, and you usually have a network of providers."

"Original Medicare with a supplement will often take a bigger bite out of your income, but you have the advantage of predictability."

Counselors can help sort through the complexities of Medicare. For example, there are eight different Medicare supplement insurance (Medigap) plan options from 65 different insurance companies.

For 2021, Philadelphia-area recipients can choose from among 33 prescription drug plans and 44 Medicare Advantage plans. Several additional programs can lower the cost for low-income recipients.

When seniors first become eligible for Medicare Part B, if they do not enroll in a drug plan but obtain coverage later, they could pay a penalty in their premiums for the rest of their life. They can switch Medigap plans any time during the year — if underwriters at the new plan accept them. But because underwriting approval is required, seniors might not be able to switch from Medicare Advantage to a Medicare supplement plan.

"We counselors are still working, giving 100% of our effort, even if we're doing it from home," Kokoles said. "We want to help you



Doug Keene

"With original Medicare and a supplement plan, you have a better sense of what your out-of-pocket expenses will be, and you can go to any provider who accepts Medicare. With Medicare Advantage, because of deductibles and co-pays, your health care expenses for the year become more of an unknown, and you usually have a network of providers."

— Doug Keene

find what works the best for you. We're not paid by anyone to do this. It's all volunteer work. If we don't have an answer, we have an awesome network and we'll reach out and find it."

In Montgomery County, RSVP is compiling a list of those interested in becoming an APPRISE counselor in 2021. If interested, contact Keene at 610-834-1040, ext. 112, douglask@rsvpmc.org

RSVP improves the lives of vulnerable populations in the Greater Philadelphia area and beyond with programs focusing on education and wellness which utilize a dedicated pool of 1,200+ volunteers. To learn more visit www.rsvpmc.org.

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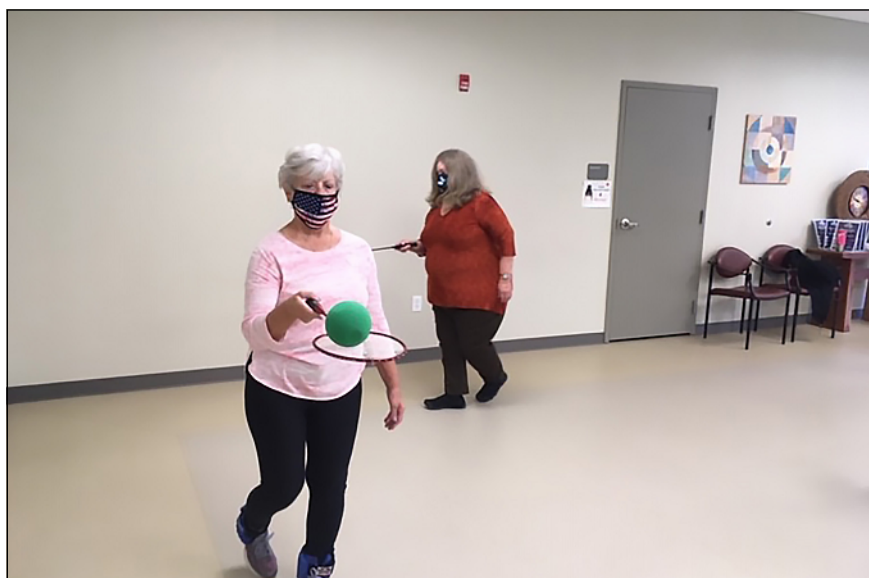
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FITNESS

PEAK Center in Lansdale offers fitness classes for seniors



The PEAK Center in Lansdale, Montgomery County, is a series of exercise classes for seniors called Fit for the Future.

By Donna Byrne

During this time of restricted social contact due to COVID-19, all seniors should be engaging in regular physical activity, which helps to prevent many common diseases, decreases isolation and improves mental health.

The PEAK Center, 606 E. Main St. in Lansdale, Montgomery County, (part of Greater Harleysville and North Penn Senior Services) will be offering two opportunities to get stronger and healthier:

Fit for the Future is a series of six classes from 9:30 to-10:30 am on Mondays (now through Dec. 7) and on Wednesdays (today through Dec. 9).

Tai Chi is a series of six classes from noon to 1 p.m. on Fridays (Nov. 6 through Dec. 18).

The Fit for the Future class is a full-body strength training program with balance components. The class is designed to increase lower body, core strength and flexibility, in order to improve balance and mobility of the participants.

The strength training and stretching of the upper body is designed to increase participants' ability to carry on with their activities of daily living (ADL), but also increase strength and flexibility (range of motion) in order



COURTESY OF THE PEAK CENTER

The PEAK Center in Lansdale, Montgomery County, is offering Fit for the Future, a series of exercise classes for seniors.

to respond to an out of balance event (fall), hopefully lessening chances of a severe injury.

Balance activities incorporated in the classes are walking on a line, side stepping, one-leg stands and many others. The balance activities, in conjunction with the strength training,

are used to improve strength, flexibility, reaction time, neuro response and confidence.

"My classes are safe, organized and fun," said instructor Kim Zimmerman.

Seniors who have taken his classes are looking forward to the return of Fit For the Future.

One participant said: "When I started class, my balance was very bad, but now I can stand on one foot for 30 seconds. I've also gradually increased my strength from using 1 or 2 lbs to 5 lb weights."

Another senior said, "I could really notice the loss in my physical condition

during the time we were closed, and I missed doing the exercises. I'm delighted to start again."

Tai chi is a Chinese form of martial arts that involves slow, controlled, relaxing and low-impact movements, which are ideal for seniors, even those with limited movement.

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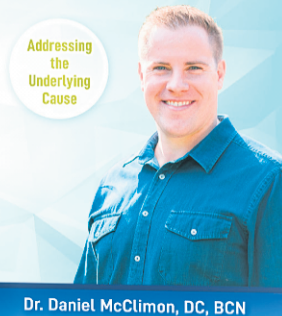


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SPOT OF T

NEW HOLIDAY TRADITIONS IN THE TIME OF COVID-19

By Terry Alburger
Brittany Pointe Estates

Each family has them: Traditions handed down from one generation to the next, or perhaps special traditions that you created for your family that you look forward to every year. These are most prevalent during the holidays.

My family is no exception. For the past 23 years, my husband and I have hosted the Christmas day festivities for family and friends. Each year, it seems that the numbers grow, as kids from one generation grow up, marry and have their own kids. We usually end up with 50 or so people, at some point during the course of the day. And we love it.

We have never considered not hosting it ... until 2020. Due to COVID-19, we have made that difficult decision to cancel the in-person gathering. And it is disappointing.

This is just one example. You likely have a similar story, perhaps vacation traditions or birthday gatherings or Thanksgiving gatherings that did not or will not happen. Our traditions are sidelined. But that's just it — sidelined, but not terminated. Good traditions will never go away. They will just take a year off.

COVID-19 is a lot like the Grinch. Though it's trying to steal Christmas, it will not succeed. If you think of that wonderful holiday program, the Grinch found out that Christmas isn't found in a store. Neither are any of our other traditions.

So, it is not the physical aspects of our traditions that are most important. It is not the massive amounts of food or the gift exchanges or even watching the football games. No, it's not the stuff. It's the people. It's your family, your friends.

So, maybe it's time to get creative. Maybe it's time to invent some new traditions. No, I don't mean forget about those sacred family traditions, I just mean put them on a shelf for now (maybe next to the proverbial Elf!) and store them safely until it is safe



COURTESY OF UNIVERSAL PICTURES

As the coronavirus pandemic continues, COVID-19 is the Grinch that's trying to steal our Christmas traditions this year. To cope, try and create some ways to celebrate safely.

for them to return.

Yes, it hurts. Yes, we will miss them greatly. But they are not going away. They are merely taking a year off. They will be back in all their splendor. Just give them time. And give yourself time.

Take a deep breath. And just think: no marathon house-cleaning sessions, no baking for days on end. It is not by choice, of course. But still, take a deep breath and put that energy to good use, think of alternate ways to celebrate the holidays safely.

There are, of course, many ven-

ues for keeping in touch with technology. You can get together via Zoom, FaceTime, Skype, Facebook Messenger ... all great ways to spend time virtually with your family members. You can watch football games together or sing Christmas carols together, you can even bake cookies together, all virtually. And you can even open gifts together on Christmas morning.

Create some new traditions: drive-by Christmas caroling or an old-fashioned cookie exchange — we can still enjoy family time. Perhaps leave a container of cookies

at you're the doors of family and friends, a nice surprise when they open the door.

Just because we cannot get together in person does not mean we cannot spend time together, virtually. And this time next year, we'll have some good stories to tell at our holiday gatherings about how we survived the 2020 Grinch - COVID 19.

Brittany Pointe Estates is a gracious Lansdale retirement community that reflects the charm of the region of France for which it is named. Situated in northern

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MILESTONES

AFTER SCHOOL JOB GROWS INTO A 'PERENNIAL' CAREER



DONNA ROVINS - MEDIANEWS GROUP PHOTO

Judy Leister works on a bridal bouquet at Levengood's Flowers in Amity Township, Berks County. Leister is celebrating her 50th anniversary with the company.

Levengood's Flowers employee celebrates 50th anniversary

By Donna Rovins
drovins@21st-centurymedia.com @MercBiz on Twitter

AMITY TWP. » When Judy (Hausman) Leister was a sophomore at Boyertown Area High School in 1970, she didn't really know what she planned to do in the future. She was taking business classes at school, and

in the late summer that year — she was looking for a part-time job.

A classmate — and now husband Paul Leister Jr. — suggested she apply at Levengood's Flowers Inc. in Amity Township. He had previously worked for Earl and Mary Levengood — who owned Levengood's Flowers Inc. at the time.

Judy Leister took his advice and was quickly hired.

That was 50 years ago. Last month, Judy Leister celebrated her 50th anniversary with the company.

"We love her, and she knows it. She is a great part of our business," current owner Donald Levengood said of Judy. "She has dedicated herself to our

business."

Leister said she never imagined at 15 that she would make a career at Levengood's, but said Mary Levengood had plans. At the time, Mary Levengood handled all of the floral designs, especially the bridal bouquets and funeral pieces.

"She started teaching me to design, to wrap corsages, make prom bouquets and wedding flowers. She had been doing it all before," Leister said.

Levengood also taught her young protégé other skills, like canning — a skill she uses to this day.

"I still can, in fact, this summer I canned 300 jars," Leister said with a ready laugh.

Today, Leister is manager and designer of the shop — and handles any job that needs to be done. She starts work at 8 every morning; Saturdays are typically days she delivers wedding flowers.

"I look through the orders and start making arrangements or casket sprays. I never know what they day will be like," she said. "Flower deliveries come in the morning, so I check them over. The wedding items come in on Monday, so I check them out." In addition, Leister answers the phone, takes orders and oversees the other employees.

Leister said over the years everything about the industry has changed. In the early years, Levengood's used flowers grown on the family farm and by local growers.

"Now we're able to get flowers from South America and California, so that we're able to offer a wide selection all year long," Leis-

ter said.

In addition, the 25 acre farm has gone from two greenhouses to 12 — soon to be 13.

As the industry has changed over the years, Levengood's customers have been able to count on Leister.

"She is very patient with people, knows our product and has done a super job," Donald Levengood said.

Leister said that she really likes interacting with customers.

"I am always making someone happy, I hope. People come in who are so sad. I sometimes end up crying. A lot of times it's people I know. At the end you try to make them happy and most of the time I do. I like pleasing people." She added that it is important to be a good listener.

The coronavirus pandemic has had an impact on the work of Leister and Levengood's Flowers.

When the pandemic struck, it was at the peak of Levengood's spring business — Easter flower sales, church services, Relay for Life events. Events, like weddings were cancelled. Levengood's initially closed, but with its agriculture license the business was deemed essential and reopened.

The shop was closed to the public, Leister said, but staff still did funeral work and birthdays. They also set-up registers on the front porch, and in April launched an online service and curbside pickup.

Spring, she said, was very busy.

"We sold more mulch than ever. We had 12 greenhouses full of items — that

were emptied over and over."

Leister said it wasn't uncommon during the spring for staff to work 60 to 70 hour weeks. Fall, she added, is also a busy time.

Over a work history of 50 years, there have been many memories, but a couple stand out for Leister. One was a casket spray she did for a prominent Boyertown businessman who passed away several years ago.

"People still talk about it," she said.

Two other memories she holds close are doing the wedding flowers for daughters Kelly and Becky.

Leister said 50 years "happened so fast." Her husband Paul retired last year, but she isn't really thinking about slowing down yet.

"I have had four months of weddings that have been postponed until next year," she said. "I'm not ready to retire."

Levengood's Flowers, 7652 Boyertown Pike in Amity Township is a third generation family-owned business that grew out of a small produce stand at the Pottstown Farmers Market owned by Donald Levengood's grandparents in 1927. In 1959 Earl and Mary founded Levengood's Flowers. Earl Levengood thought they could add flowers to expand the business, according to Donald Levengood.

"He sent my mom to school in Philadelphia to learn how to arrange flowers. It evolved into what it is today," he said.

Donald and his wife Diane Levengood, who took over in 1978. The business is managed by Levengood's son, John Levengood.

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With Faith Woodward, Director of Admissions and Marketing at Barclay Friends—to learn more, please call 610-696-5211 or visit our website, <http://bf.kendal.org/>.



Levengood's Flowers in Amity Township, Berks County handles a flower order in this Oct. 1, 2020 photo.

SENIOR LIFE

Rydal Waters opens with ribbon-cutting ceremony



One of the new cottages at Rydal Waters.



COURTESY OF RYDAL WATERS

Rydal Waters, an expansion of the Rydal Park Life Plan Community, officially opened the new cottage neighborhood with a virtual ribbon cutting ceremony.

MediaNews Group

Rydal Waters, an expansion of the Rydal Park Life Plan Community, officially opened the new cottage neighborhood with a virtual ribbon cutting ceremony.

The virtual event brought together local officials, Rydal Waters' charter members, HumanGood leadership and board members, vendor partners and Rydal Waters' team members to celebrate the milestone.

Rydal Waters offers exceptional cottage living for active older adults and is located on the grounds of the historic Harbison Estate located in Abington Township, Montgomery County.

The virtual celebration included remarks from U.S. Congresswoman Madeline Dean, HumanGood President and CEO John Cochrane and Rydal Waters' charter members.

Attendees were also treated to a musical performance by local baritone and Broadway performer Keith Spencer.

The Rydal Waters neighborhood will have 80-plus



The clubhouse at Rydal Waters.

two-bedroom, two-bath, beautifully appointed cottages on a 33-acre campus. Residents will have access to a clubhouse with a fitness center; cocktail lounge; outdoor heated swimming pool; fire pit; outdoor grilling area and much more. The community will also feature a dog park and walking trails.

Rydal Waters' residents have reciprocal privileges with everything offered at Rydal Park, including access to dining venues, activity areas, programming and more.

"HumanGood's mission is to help people live their best lives possible," Cochrane said. "The Rydal Waters neighborhood was

thoughtfully planned to complement our residents' busy and active lifestyles. I am proud of the progress we've made in the past year

and am thrilled to see this new community come to life."

Groundbreaking on the Rydal Waters cottage neighborhood began in 2019, and the new community is the result of years of planning and design. The single-family cottages offer a spectrum of options and amenities, demonstrating the thought that has gone into the neighborhood from its initial conception. Of course, the most compelling feature is the promise of future care if ever needed.

Charter members Dee and Marty Weisberg were deeply involved in the design of their new home and excited to be founding members of a new, vibrant community.

"We're thrilled to be part of our new community, and so happy to see how easy it has been to instantly become friends with our new neighbors," Marty said.

More information on Rydal Waters can be found at www.humangood.org/rydalwaters.

About HumanGood: HumanGood was founded on the belief that everyone should have the opportunity to live life with enthusiasm, confidence and security, regardless of physical, social or economic circumstances. Our mission is to ensure that those we serve have every opportunity to become their best selves as they define it. This extends to those who live in our communities, their family and friends and those who serve them. With approximately 5,000 team members serving more than 13,000 residents in our 21 life plan communities and 95 affordable housing communities, HumanGood is the sixth-largest nonprofit senior living provider in the country. To learn more visit HumanGood.org.

A PROUD PATRIOT

Bern Township man, 99, honored for WWII



COURTESY - MARK M. GILLEN

Edward W. Mull, a World War II veteran, was honored recently during his 99th birthday party at his Bern Township home. State Rep. Mark M. Gillen and his daughter, 7-year-old Suzannah, presented him with a commendation for his service in the Battle of the Bulge and other operations in the European Theater.

By Ron Devlin
rdevlin@readingeagle.com
[@rondevlinre](https://twitter.com/rondevlinre) on Twitter

At his 99th birthday party, Edward W. Mull of Bern Township was honored for his service in World War II.

State Rep. Mark M. Gillen, founder of the Berks Military History Museum, presented Mull with a commendation for his service in the Battle of the Bulge and other operations in the European Theater.

Mull turned 99 on Oct. 8, and was guest of honor at a birthday party on Oct. 10 at the home of his daughter,

Barbara Miller, with whom he resides.

Enlisting at the U.S. Post Office in Reading in June 1942, he served in the 80th Infantry Division throughout the war in Europe.

Rising from private to staff sergeant, he was discharged in late 1945.

During the Battle of the Bulge, which was fought in December 1944 and January 1945, Mull was one of 22 infantrymen injured when his platoon was crossing a minefield somewhere in Belgium.

A Purple Heart recipient, he still retains shrapnel from the exploding land-

mine in his ankle.

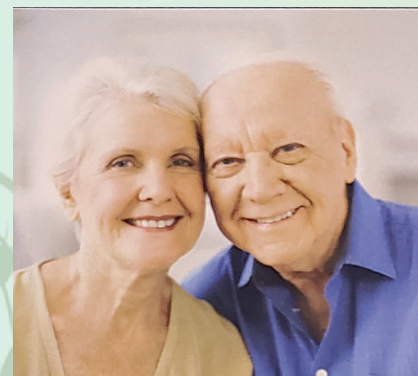
Mull proudly wears a baseball hat inscribed "World War II," and vividly recalls wartime experiences he often shares with family members.

Like many of the "Greatest Generation," Mull willingly answered his country's call to service. He's typically modest about the sacrifices he made in defense of his country during one of its darkest hours.

"Sgt. Mull's main concern," Gillen said, "is that his comrades that have passed away are not forgotten."

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ELECTION 2020

101-YEAR-OLD NOT SITTING THIS ONE OUT

Calls Nov. 3 the most important election of her lifetime

By Karen Shuey
kshuey@readingeagle.com
@KarenShueyRE on Twitter

Mary Jane Jacoby was a toddler when women first got the right to vote.

She was born on the heels of one world war and would come to know the horrors of living through a second.

She was alive when the first man flew across the Atlantic Ocean. She saw the Great Depression push the country into poverty. She saw a president assassinated. She witnessed a man walk on the moon. She lived through the fight for civil rights and gender equality.

Jacoby has seen an awful lot in her 101 years on Earth. She has seen devastating tragedies, triumphant victories and practically everything in between.

So it should come as no surprise that she's not going to let a little thing like a global pandemic keep her from the ballot box on Election Day.

Jacoby said that on Election Day she will head off down the street, grasping her cane in her hand, to make the three-and-a-half block walk to her polling site to cast a ballot in the 2020 presidential election.

She jokes that the short trip will likely take her about 15 minutes to complete but that it will be well worth the effort.

"I've been voting ever since I can remember, so I'm not about to sit this one out," the Pennside woman



BEN HASTY — READING EAGLE

Mary Jane Jacoby, 101, of Pennside won't let the pandemic prevent her from voting.

said with a laugh. "I don't trust voting by mail, and I want to know my vote counts — especially this year."

Not worried

At her age, Jacoby is at high risk for becoming severely ill if she contracted the coronavirus. But she said she's not worried. And, she added, if she's not worried about it then others shouldn't let it keep them from exercising their civic duty.

She said people should be

careful but not scared.

"The pandemic never has scared me," she said. "We've lived through other pandemics and we have come out the other side. I don't believe most of these figures anyway because they are so skewed. I don't think it's any worse than any other pandemic."

Jacoby said that if people don't vote then they deserve what they get.

"Voting is a right that a lot of people have died for and we should not take that for granted," she said.

Too much at stake

Jacoby, a former accountant for the Continental Can Co. in Muhlenberg Township before it was shuttered, said she believes this is the most important election of her lifetime.

"The whole country is going in the wrong direction," she said. "I don't like what I'm hearing and seeing on TV. I've been trying to follow both sides, but I've heard too many lies for the past four years from the Democrats."

Jacoby said she will proudly cast her ballot for President Donald Trump.

"You bet!" she said when asked if she supports his second term in office. "I think he's in touch with the people, and I think the Democrats just want power."

The self-described conservative said she wishes Democrats would have tried to work with Trump the past four years instead of against him.

"My goodness this country would be in wonderful

shape," she said. "But they put too many stumbling blocks in his way. I really think Trump was sent here for a purpose."

2020 also happens to mark the 100th anniversary of the 19th Amendment, which granted women the right to vote. Jacoby said that is a good milestone to celebrate by heading to the polls.

"I think it's a good thing women can vote because we have just as much to suffer with as men do," she said with a laugh.

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— Jill R. and Rod S.,

family members of resident



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BERKS COUNTY

DATE WITH THE PAST

92-year-old comes across his confirmation in a 1943 Reading Eagle

By Ron Devlin
rdevlin@readingeagle.com
@rondevlinre on Twitter

Malcolm P. Heffley is no believer in fate, but that sentiment might be changing.

A recent believe-it-or-not experience involving a Reading Eagle newspaper published during World War II has left him wondering how in the world it could have happened.

Heffley, a 92-year-old Berks County native, unexpectedly stumbled across his name in a Reading Eagle published on April 19, 1943.

The discovery in a paper printed more than 77 years ago rekindled a relationship with Berks, where Heffley grew up during the Great Depression.

"I just couldn't believe it," said Heffley, who's retired and lives with family in Northampton County. "It was so strange."

A stunning find

As Malcolm Heffley tells it, it happened this way:

A neighbor with an interest in history came across the 77-year-old Reading Eagle a while back.

He kept it because it contained an ad that featured a photo of Adolf Hitler.

It read, "Today is Hitler's birthday. Let's give him plenty. Buy United States War Bonds."

The ad showed a large photo of Hitler, a confident smirk on his face, giving the trademark salute.

The gift of "plenty" mentioned in the ad, it's fair to assume, referred to bombs and other munitions to be purchased with funds from war bonds.

The county's quota of bonds, according to the ad, was about \$18.2 million.

The old Reading Eagle recently made its way around the Northampton neighborhood, eventually landing at Heffley's house.

He'd grown up in Kutztown, and seeing an old Reading Eagle was a bit like going home all over again.

Indeed, the paper had run stories when the Pennsylvania National Guard unit in Kutztown, of which Heffley was a member, was federalized during the Korean War.

And when he had an interest in the Maple Grove Hotel in Longswamp Township, the business was mentioned now and again in the Eagle.

So, Heffley paged through the old newspaper, thinking



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Kutztown-17
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John D. Frederick
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Arline P. Merkel
Richard A. Rhoads
Billy DeT. Scholl
Mary V. Sharadin
Doris A. Stein
Elda B. M. Stern
Edgar D. Weiser Jr.
Doris C. Werley

The listing in the next day's paper.



COURTESY OF NICHOLAS MATTESI

Malcolm P. Heffley, 92, who lives in Northampton County, found his name in a Reading Eagle published in 1943 that was a keepsake of a neighbor, rekindling memories of his youth in Berks County. He was among 17 youngsters who received confirmation at St. Paul's Reformed in Kutztown on Palm Sunday, April 18, 1943, which was listed in the next day's paper.

there might be something in there he'd remember.

He wasn't prepared, however, for what he would find on page 6 under the headline "594 Catechumens Take Vows in Rural Berks."

There, at the very bottom of the page were the names of 17 persons confirmed at St. Paul's Reformed Church in Kutztown on Palm Sunday, April 18, 1943.

And, Heffley's name was one of them.

"Oh, my goodness," he remembers saying to himself. "There's my name."

Heffley remembers every person in his confirmation class, as well as the Rev. Francis F. Renoll, pastor, who conferred the religious rite.

As far as he knows, he and one other person are the only remaining members of the class.

He's a bit hazy about confirmation day itself, remembering only that the class had to go to the front of the church to take the vows. And, that they had their photo taken outside the church on Whiteoak Street afterward.

Nevertheless, it was an important day in his young life and he has treasured its memory for all these years.

"I still have the photo," he said.

Berks County roots

Heffley's life has taken him far from Berks County. A professional chef and baker, he was chief steward aboard Sunoco vessels hauling crude oil between Philadelphia and Corpus Christi, Texas, for many years.

Though an accident retired him in 1984, Heffley still harbors a deep attachment to eastern Berks County.

He once resided in Krumsville and Lenhartsville. His grandfather, A.A. Fister, owned a hotel in Krumsville. And, on his mother's side, there is an attachment to the former Hunsicker farm in Maxatawny Township.

Looking back, a part of him years for the halcyon days of his youth in Krumsville.

The Heffleys, a self-sufficient Pennsylvania Dutch family, had a vegetable garden. They made their own ketchup and jarred meats.

The family gathered around the radio to listen to the Tommy Dorsey Band and played Hasenpfeffer, a popular card game.

The old homestead had an outhouse and the Heffleys didn't have a telephone until the early 1950s. Even then, Heffley recalls, it was

a party line shared by a dozen or more families.

Heffley retains the down-to-earth lessons he learned at home — self-reliance,

hard work and a respect for others — throughout his life.

Even now, preparing to bake a batch of honey buns

for a local restaurant, he lives by a credo rooted in rural Berks County culture: "You do a good job and you do it right."



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Malcolm P. Heffley — third row, second from right — was confirmed on Palm Sunday, April 18, 1943, at St. Paul's Reformed in Kutztown. Now 92, he's kept the photo for 77 years.

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FOR THEIR SAFETY *and your confidence.*

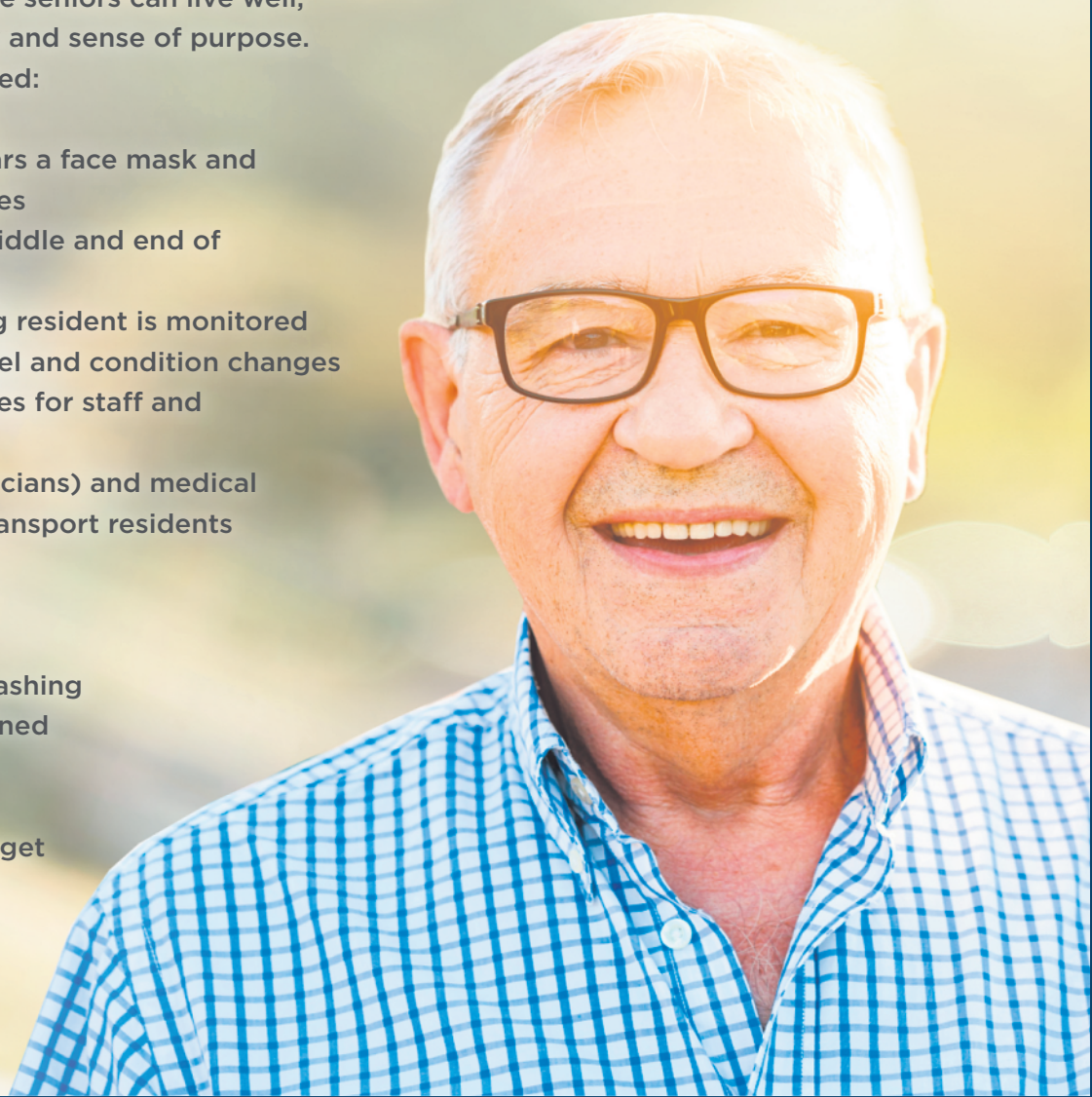
We create a safe, enriching community where seniors can live well, know they're safe, and maintain their dignity and sense of purpose. In today's changed world, you can rest assured:

- Everyone entering our community wears a face mask and is screened according to CDC guidelines
- Staff are screened at the beginning, middle and end of their shifts
- Every personal care and skilled nursing resident is monitored for temperature, oxygen saturation level and condition changes
- We work with national-level laboratories for staff and resident testing
- We welcome PCPs (primary care physicians) and medical specialists, as residents require, and transport residents to medical appointments

Diligence.

We follow CDC guidelines for masks, handwashing and social distancing because we're determined to keep you or your loved ones safe.

Call **484-881-3107** today to learn more or to get a copy of The Complete Guide to Senior Health and Wellness.



Independent Living | Personal Care | Skilled Nursing & Rehabilitation
 PC #141360 & SNF #21250201
 1361 Boot Road | West Chester, PA 19380
WWW.SENIORLIFESTYLE.COM



Assisted Living & Memory Support

We invite you to visit us and see why so many people have chosen our senior living community.

Call Today for More Information or to Schedule a Personal Tour!

Lisa McDonough, Executive Director
267-408-4090

1730 Buck Road, Feasterville-Trevose, PA 19053
www.smfeasterville.com

