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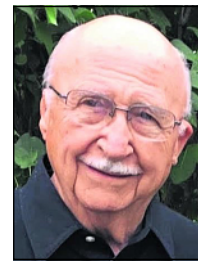


COURTESY OF ELEANOR SHANER
Richard H. "Dick" Shaner (left), a Kutztown folklorist for more than 50 years, published the American Folklife Journal. He is shown with John Heyl in a 2008 photo. Shaner died at age 82 on Jan. 10, 2021.

2 prominent historians lost

Earl Ibach and Dick Shaner have died

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



Ibach

In spring 2007, George M. Meiser IX and Earl W. Ibach set out on an expedition to find the source of Tulpehocken Creek. It was a demanding task for the pair of Berks County historians — Ibach was 84 years old at the time and, shall we say, Meiser was no youngster either.

Driven by an insatiable devotion to Berks County history, the pair persevered and traced the creek's headwaters to a trickle coming from beneath a fallen tree in North Lebanon Township.

Meiser recorded the find in "The Passing Scene, Volume 15," an omnibus photographic history compiled with his wife, Gloria Jean Meiser.

Meiser recalled the daylong trek recently while reflecting on the life and work of Ibach, 98, who died Jan. 22 in Womelsdorf.

The loss was compounded by the passing of another dedicated local historian, Richard H. Shaner, 82, who died Jan. 10 in Kutztown.

"Almost all my history buddies are gone," lamented Meiser, a past president of Berks History Center. "It's unsettling to me."

Charles J. Adams III, editor of "The Historical Review of Berks County," said Ibach and Shaner left a lasting impact

on local history.

"These two gentlemen were keepers of the historical flame," he said. "A flame, somewhat akin to the Olympic flame, that has been carried through generations."

Mr. Womelsdorf

Earl Ibach's presence in the town of his birth was so pervasive he was accorded the unofficial title of "Mr. Womelsdorf" and was presented with a key to the borough.

"Tuffy" Ibach served in Gen. George S. Patton's Third Army during World War II. While convalescing in London, he met and married Dorothy L. Wallis. They celebrated their 75th wedding anniversary last July.

Passionate about local history, Ibach was the driving force behind the formation of the Tulpehocken Settlement Historical Society in 1970. He edited The Tulpehocken Tattler history newsletter for 23 years, and was named director emeritus in 2006.

In 1976, Ibach published "Hub of the Tulpehocken," a landmark 700-page history of a region whose name is drawn from the Lenape word for "land of turtles."

He also wrote "Tulpehocken Cigarama," a history of the region's cigar industry.

Loretta Barnes, Ibach's daughter, said his civic pride lay at the root of his interest in history.

"He would always say remember your roots," said Barnes, a retired Lehigh County teacher.

Jay F. Miller, 91, a neighbor for 52 years, recalls sitting on Ibach's patio and talking about the town's history.

In a sympathy note, Miller wrote: "There will never be another person like Earl. There will never be another Mr. Womelsdorf."

HISTORIANS » PAGE C2



A community that has come together, while looking forward to growth and change.

We are not just a community; we are a safe place to call home. At Riddle Village, we are taking every precaution in this difficult time to ensure our residents, employees and caregivers are protected. At the same time, we are still working with those who understand a plan for the future and our extensive Lifecare contract offers peace of mind.

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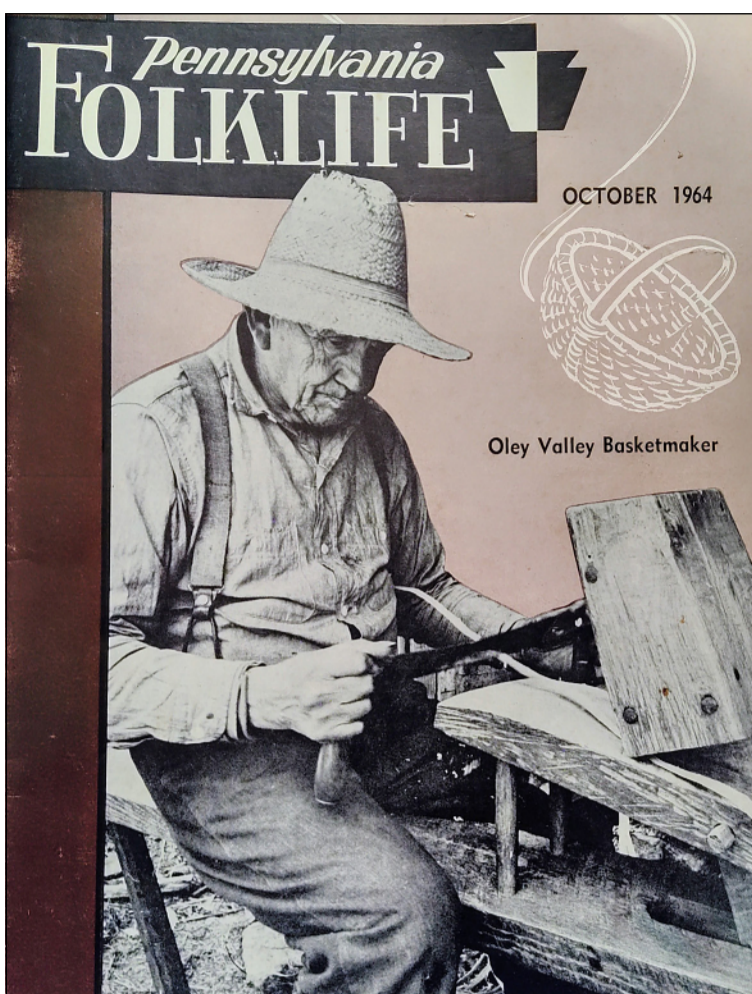


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Richard H. Shaner profiled Pennsylvania Dutch basketmaker Freddy Bieber in a 1964 article in Pennsylvania Folklife.

COURTESY OF PENNSYLVANIA FOLKLIFE



COURTESY OF LORETTA BARNES

Earl and Dorothy Ibach were married in London during World War II in 1945. They celebrated their 75th wedding anniversary in 2020.



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Historians

FROM PAGE C1

Lover of lore

Dick Shaner's insight into Pennsylvania Dutch culture is apparent in "Oley Valley Basketmaker," an article published in the Pennsylvania Folklife magazine in 1964.

It profiles Freddy Bieber, 79, an itinerant basketmaker in the Oley Valley.

He and his wife, Annie, spoke only Pennsylvania Dutch and lived in an 18th Century fieldstone house with a spring in the cellar.

"Without electricity, automobile or automation, he works and takes pleasure in the same things our ancestors did 200 years ago," Shaner wrote of Bieber, his great-uncle. "He is one of the few living basket craftsmen who works in the early American tradition."

Shaner's sharp eye for detail was demonstrated when he noted that Bieber made baskets in the eight-quart size, most commonly used by the hill folk for gathering eggs, vegetables and berries.

"Dick liked people," Eleanor Shaner said of her husband of 50 years. "He was a people person, and was always able to connect with people."

Craig A. Koller, Kutztown Historical Society

"Fortunately, they recorded and preserved valuable aspects of Berks County history. Hopefully, we can inspire budding historians to continue in their footsteps."

— Floyd Turner

president, said Shaner was a mentor or sorts.

"I was always interested in history, but Dick taught me how important it was for us to learn about our local history," he said. "He emphasized how unique the Pennsylvania Dutch culture is and thus very much needed to be preserved and documented."

Shaner published the American Folklife Journal during the 1970s and, in 2015, wrote "Oley Valley Heritage: The Federal Years," with Richard L. T. Orth.

Adams, author of several books of ghost stories, said Shaner helped him with research on hauntings in the Oley Valley.

"He was an inspiration," Adams said. "His interest in history went beyond dates, places and people; he was deeply interested in the lore of the land."

They left their mark

Brian Englehardt, a frequent contributor to the "Historical Review of Berks County," said Ibach and Shaner left an indelible mark on local history.

"They advanced the baton of local history for several generations," he said. "Not only in keeping it alive, but by encouraging those who come behind them to continue the study of the history to which they have devoted large parts of their lives."

Floyd Turner, president of the Berks History Center, said the work of Ibach and Shaner stands as a benchmark for historians of the future.

"Fortunately, they recorded and preserved valuable aspects of Berks County history," he said. "Hopefully, we can inspire budding historians to continue in their footsteps."

Donna Reed, former editor of the Historical Review, said their writings provide views of local history that might otherwise be obstructed.

"They loved the lore and the lure of Pennsylvania German ways," said Reed, a Reading city councilwoman. "They dug in, came to know who lived in the old houses, who founded churches and businesses, who traveled the roads and who did the living and dying before them."

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SPOT OF T

DON'T MISS THE TRAIN



PIXABAY

Time spent stopped by a train at a railroad crossing can be well spent if you accept that the situation is out of your control.

By Terry Alburger
Brittany Pointe Estates

I'm one of those lucky few who enjoy a scenic and peaceful commute to and from work. I pass parks, streams, ponds, farms and lots of wooded areas. With few exceptions, it is a calming and serene drive. Most days.

Yesterday, however, there was an interesting twist. As I approached a railroad crossing, I saw that there was a long line of cars stopped, and ahead of us was a freight train, which had come to a complete stop, bisecting my commute.

This train went on as far as I could see, in both directions, and there was no indication that it planned on going anywhere. After a few minutes, cars in front of me started to perform three-point turns and head back the way they came. I contemplated this maneuver, but, being an optimist, I waited a few more minutes.

I waited ... I waited ... I waited ... to no avail. It seems we as human beings have a hard time just sitting still. We need to be in motion. So, I turned around and headed back the way the rest of the traffic was going. Surely, those people knew something I didn't.

The beauty of a Plan B is that you get to see new, unplanned vista. It is a small town, and I thought I knew the lay of the land. But it had all changed! I guess COVID-19 created some empty stores, and opportunity created some new ones. Interesting which ones survived.

This rerouted trip suddenly came to a stop as I realized that same railroad track ran across this road as well, and much to my surprise, that same train was that long! It blocked two railroad crossings, a good distance apart.

My first reaction was laughter and a resounding, "You have got to be kid-

ding!" I think it was God's way of telling me to slow down. Enjoy the view. Relax. I'm most definitely not the one in control! Message received.

Do you know how bright blue the sky was yesterday morning? A deep blue, dotted with fluffy white clouds. I would not have noticed had I not been sidelined by this long, mechanical snake blocking two different crossings.

I had time to think, time to ponder and even time for a chat with God. It was quiet time, well-needed and well-appreciated. Every once in awhile we are given oppor-

tunities to enjoy some solitude, and speaking for myself, most times, I don't recognize them as such.

A traffic jam, construction delays, trains, all good times to sit still, breathe deep and count your blessings. Trust me, start listening them and there will be many. If you're going through a bad time, you can still be grateful for the air you breathe, the roof over your head or good friends. There's always something.

Just as you may adjust your route depending on the circumstances, so you can also adjust your state of mind. I imagine I could have gotten angry at the

train, at the situation, at the fact that I would be getting to work a few minutes later than planned ... but why?

I would much rather give it a positive spin and laugh at the irony of my rushing out of one situation, only to be sidelined by that same situation, in a different location. It was completely out of my control.

I guess my Polyanna-type personality helps me in times like this. Life is beautiful, but sometimes the beauty is hidden, and you have to search for it. It may even be hibernating, but I promise, it will awaken, and once again grace your days with smiles.

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Among Friends

with Faith C. Woodward
Director of Admission and Marketing

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A positive experience at summer camp starts with careful planning. Seniors should talk to their doctors first to ensure they are medically able to participate in summer camp activities. Once cleared for camp, seniors should consider whether they want to spend their time only with older adults or an all-ages group. The lives of older adults become more meaningful when they are provided with opportunities to use their capabilities to the maximum potential.

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

SEASON OF SUFFERING

It's that time of year for those who fall prey to springtime allergies. A Berks allergist offers ways to fight back.



BEN HASTY — READING EAGLE

REG-L-Magnolia In Bloom

By Don Botch
 abotch@readingeagle.com



Daley

Spring has sprung and most people are looking forward to venturing back out into the great outdoors for exercise and recreation.

But for seasonal allergy sufferers, airborne pollens

have the potential to knock the spring right out of your step.

The struggle is real for many people.

"It certainly can be very debilitating," said Dr. Aparna Daley of Tullyview Allergy, Wyomissing. "And being an allergist, we're in a position where we actually can see and appreciate this."

Daley said when people think of general comorbid conditions, there's a tendency to underestimate

the impact of allergies. But feeling sick or unwell can not only affect your overall health, it can lead to lost work days and corresponding declines in productivity.

Also, uncontrolled allergies may lead to exacerbations in patients with other chronic conditions such as asthma, so controlling allergies is going to improve patients' quality of life and ease the effects of other conditions, as well.

SEASON » PAGE C6

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BEN HASTY — READING EAGLE

A canopy of blooming trees covers North 10th Street in Reading in this file photo. The flowers may look pretty, but for some they signal the arrival of seasonal allergies.

Season

FROM PAGE C5

Allergies or COVID?

Daley said that with the pandemic raging, some sufferers might be confused as to whether they have allergies or COVID-19.

With COVID, she said, symptoms typically include things like fever, chills and body ache, which you don't necessarily see with allergies.

Seasonal allergy symptoms normally include runny nose, sneezing, watering and/or itchy eyes, and post-nasal drip.

She advised anybody concerned about overlap-

ping symptoms to consult their primary care practitioner to rule out COVID.

Unfortunately, allergy sufferers could be in for a long haul. This is the season for trees to pollinate, and as we get into the summer, the grass tends to pollinate. Then, moving toward fall, weeds become the culprit — typically ragweed.

“What we typically hear from our patients is symptoms tend to worsen for a lot of them with tree sensitizations in the spring,” Daley said. “It really depends on what they're allergic to.”

Fighting back

Daley said that short of

medicating, there are basic steps allergy sufferers can take short to ease their symptoms, including keeping doors and windows closed and showering after outdoor activity.

As for medications, over-the-counter antihistamines and intranasal corticosteroid sprays are usually the first line of defense.

But some people may need to see an allergist to get their symptoms under control.

“What I usually recommend is having allergy testing is very helpful and relatively easy to do,” she said. “We certainly do encourage evaluation, and then treatment can be tailored to different patients.”

There is one other step

sufferers could take, but depending upon which side of the divide you're on, you may not want to hear this: Daley said wearing face masks outdoors can be helpful to allergy sufferers.

“Interestingly, it does seem to help a lot of patients who would not normally be wearing a mask who find that especially if they are allergic to pollen, it does seem to help them in terms of reducing that exposure,” she said. “So I guess there's more than one benefit from (wearing a mask).”

Early going

Daley said her office has been very busy so far this year, but it's too early to tell

if whether it's going to be an especially bad year for allergies.

That largely hinges on the weather. Dry, windy days (and seasons) tend to be super-spreaders of pollen.

Apart from that, there are other variables:

- A late freeze can delay tree pollen.

- Rain can have varying effects: It can wash away pollens, but rain in the late fall or winter can increase tree pollen.

A native of Rhode Island who grew up in South Africa, Daley completed her allergy and immunology fellowship last June at Penn State Hershey Medical Center.

She said Tullyview, one

of only two allergists in the county, focuses on patient care and patient education. She and Dr. Edward Skorpinski treat a variety of conditions, including people who have environmental allergies, food allergies, asthma, immuno-deficiencies, frequent infections and hives.

“We are pretty passionate allergists, so we're keen to help where possible,” she said.

If you are on the fence about having allergy testing, she offered this word of caution:

“With global warming, we're likely to see worsening of seasonal allergies. So if one takes a long-term view, that is likely to affect everyone.”



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CELEBRATIONS

Heritage of Green Hills celebrates International Day of Happiness



Maddie LaBelle, a member of the food and beverage team.



Residents Rose Gray, left, and Terri Mscichowski during the International Day of Happiness celebration at the Heritage of Green Hills.

COURTESY OF THE HERITAGE OF GREEN HILLS

The Heritage of Green Hills

The Heritage of Green Hills, a healthy life plan community in Cumru Township, Berks County, pulled out all the stops to spread cheer on March 20, the International Day of Happiness.

“It’s been a rough year, full of uncertainty,” said the community’s Well By Design Director Cheryl Anderson. “But now that spring has arrived, and our team and residents have gotten both shots of the COVID-19 vaccination, we thought we should celebrate some things the pandemic couldn’t take away from us, like our friendships, a sense of humor and fun and our creativity.”

Residents donned fabulously ridiculous squid hats



Resident Pat Sauder wears a squid hat.

to play the Best Friends Challenge, the Duck Chuck and Chicken Flickin’ at a “Don’t Worry, Be Happy” party held on the Tavern’s sun-soaked patio.

Harmonicas were handed out for a spontaneous con-

cert, and heaps of smiley-face cookies were served.

“The weather couldn’t have been better,” Anderson said. “Everyone got a much needed dose of vitamin D along with some healing laughter.”

The Heritage’s signature Well By Design program is a mind, body and spirit initiative offering activities, classes, events (like the International Day of Happiness Party) and services focusing on eight dimensions of wellness — social, physical, intellectual, emotional, vocational, spiritual, environmental and health services.

Learn more about International Day of Happiness at www.dayofhappiness.net. This year’s theme was “Keep Calm. Stay Wise. Be Kind.”

ANNIVERSARY

The Hickman marks 130-year anniversary

The Hickman Friends Senior Community of West Chester

The Hickman Friends Senior Community of West Chester celebrated its 130-year anniversary on Thursday with cupcakes, refreshments and music.

The founding mission of The Hickman has always been its commitment to ensure that seniors in the community who need a supportive living environment will always have one right here in West Chester.

Throughout our history, we have adapted, grown and faced challenges with foresight and confidence. As we cautiously emerge from the pandemic, we are

focused on the emotional well-being of our residents through family interaction, resumption of group activities and the comfort of The Hickman community.

We are grateful partners of the Quaker Block in partnership with the West Chester Friends Meeting and West Chester Friends School, which, along with our longstanding relationship with the West Chester community, has enhanced the lives of our residents. The leadership team is extremely optimistic for the future of all things Hickman!

The Hickman Friends Senior Community of West Chester, founded by Lydia

Hall and Sallie Sharpless in 1891, provides comfortable and caring accommodations for seniors in West Chester. Led by Quaker traditions and principles, the Hickman is based on a rental model, which enables seniors to easily choose a safe and thriving personal care community as their home without onerous up-front costs.

If you are interested in knowing more about what the Hickman can provide for you or a loved one, contact us. To provide support for the Hickman in its mission, consider a donation. For additional information, visit www.thehickman.org or call 484-760-6300.



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Residents at the Hickman Friends Senior Community celebrate its 130-year anniversary by listening to some music.

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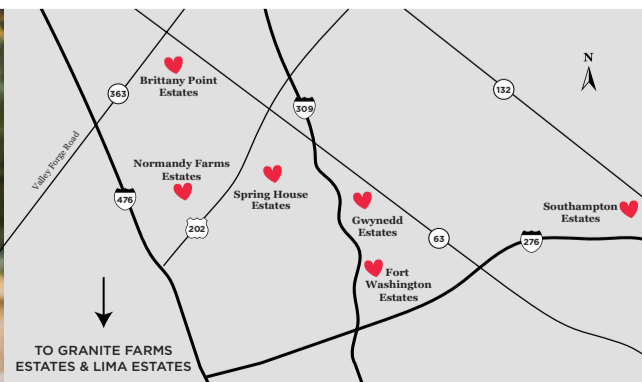


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CHESTNUT KNOLL

Education, support for those with Parkinson's

Chestnut Knoll

Chestnut Knoll Personal Care and Memory Care and FOX Rehabilitation provide informative discussions each month via Zoom to support the well-being of those living with Parkinson's disease, followed by an upbeat exercise class. The next Parkinson's Learn and Share is Thursday, April 15, beginning at 2 p.m. Attendees can also call in using the phone number provided at registration. Learn more about symptom-based treatments to help with rigidity, bradykinesia and freezing, a sudden but temporary inability to move, from Dr. Andrew Harnish, FOX Optimal Liv-

ing rehab director. He has a doctorate in physical therapy; is a board certified geriatric clinical specialist; APTA credentialed clinical instructor; and LSVT certified BIG therapist. Following the Parkinson's Learn and Share, join our group exercise class featuring Harnish and exercise physiologist Eric Sartor. They will use targeted movements to improve your posture, balance, range of motion, strength and endurance. Seminars and group exercise classes are free and held on the third Thursday of every month. To receive your Zoom link or conference number, call 610-473-8066.

Chestnut Knoll is an award-winning senior community in Boyertown offering Personal Care and Memory Care residences at an affordable month-to-month lease with no buy-in fees. Services include 24-hour personal care assistance with medical support, meals, housekeeping, social events, and transportation. All residents have access to FOX Optimal Living, an evidence-based continuum of wellness and rehab services. Chestnut Knoll also offers At Home Services, available to seniors where they live. This service includes assistance with medication monitoring, personal care, companion care, light housekeeping

ALZHEIMER'S SUPPORT DEOUP

Understand the basics

Chestnut Knoll

Are you caring for a loved one living with memory impairment? Join senior care experts from Chestnut Knoll via Zoom for an Alzheimer's support group featuring insightful topics to help family caregivers on April 15 from 6:30 to 8

p.m. Attendees can also join by phone at 1-646-558-8656. In the early stages of Alzheimer's disease, individuals and families may be unsure how to manage symptoms and behavioral changes, what to expect as the disease progresses or how caregiving will impact their daily lives.

To help you understand the basics, get perspective and insight from professional and family caregivers' firsthand experiences through various stages of the disease. RSVP by calling 610-473-8066. Zoom meeting code: 585 786 5203

LUNCH AND LEARN

Navigating through COVID-19 and beyond

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Jodie Daniels for a free Lunch and Learn discussion on "Navigating Resources through COVID-19 and Beyond" at Grind Restaurant, 45 S. Reading Ave., Boyertown next Wednesday from 12:30-2 p.m. A certified senior ad-

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CORONAVIRUS

GIVING BACK



SHEA SINGLEY — READING EAGLE

The Highlands of Wyomissing residents, seated from front to back, Eve Kimball, Jane Bitner, Carol Duchynski and Diana Kleiner volunteer at the two-day COVID-19 vaccine clinic on Monday. Sponsored by The Highlands and Esterbrook Pharmacy in West Reading, the goal of the clinic is to vaccinate up to 1,300 community members.

Vaccinated senior living residents help with clinic

By Shea Singley
 ssingley@southschuylkillnews.com
 @SheaSingley on Twitter

Residents of The Highlands of Wyomissing know how it feels to

be fully vaccinated against COVID-19. They now want to help the community experience those same feelings.

The continuing care retirement community and West Reading's Esterbrook Pharmacy have partnered together to host community vaccination clinics at The Highlands for those currently eligible as part of the state's Phase 1A group. The most recent two-day clinic started Monday and will continue Tuesday with the goal of vaccinating up to 1,300 community members with the Pfizer

vaccine.

Including this week's clinic, Kevin DeAcosta, president and CEO of The Highlands at Wyomissing, said they will be close to having administered 3,000 doses of vaccine through the clinics so far.

Residents give back

Running a smooth and efficient clinic, particularly with COVID safety precautions in place, requires many moving parts and a number of staff and volunteers. In addition to pharmacy and

The Highlands staff members, community residents have volunteered their time to help with the clinics.

"Living here at The Highlands has been a gift, during this entire pandemic," said Pat Gernert, 88. "The Highlands is a gift which fills us with gratitude because they kept us in a bubble of safety. It's the gift they gave us to keep us safe and then when the vaccine became available it filled us with gratitude again."

Gernert said the vaccine has given her more freedom as she

feels safer going out again, such as going into the drug store or using the drive-thru at her bank. She now wants to give that same freedom to others.

"I'm volunteering now, it's what you do, giving back," she said. "There's many ways to give back. You give back with your hands. You can give back with your checkbook. You can give back with your mind. It's giving back, you live to give."

Gernert volunteered at the second dose scheduling station during

GIVING » PAGE D2



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Giving

FROM PAGE D1

ing Monday's clinic. There she helped attendees schedule their second dose appointments, set three weeks from now at The Highlands at the same time they received their first dose. At the table, she had the chance to speak with attendees while filling out their vaccine cards.

"This is wonderful and I'm meeting lovely people here," she said. "People are so full of gratitude."

Fellow resident Carol Duchynski, 78, was also at the second dose scheduling station. Duchynski has a history of volunteering and enjoys helping in whatever way she can with any project.

"I think this is a really worthy cause, and I'm very happy to do it," she said. "It's been very rewarding. People are so gracious and they're very happy to have us doing this. I'm happy that people are coming, and they're very glad to have us do this."

After receiving their first dose and before scheduling their second dose appointments, attendees were required to sit for at least 15 minutes under observation in case of any adverse reactions to the vaccine. Chairs were set up in the multipurpose room, with social distancing in mind, and volunteers would clean chairs and direct attendees to an available seat. While they waited under observation, attendees could read handouts on their chair about what they may experience after receiving the vaccine, ask questions and listen to the music that was played.

Residents and physicians Tony Kleiner, 76, and Dan Kimball, 81, were two of the volunteers in this step of the process.

"Once a doctor, always a doctor, that's the way that goes," Kleiner said on why he decided to volunteer. "We all realize the best



SHEA SINGLEY — READING EAGLE

The Highlands of Wyomissing resident James Barrett directs a COVID-19 vaccine clinic attendee to one of the open seats in the observation area during the two-day clinic Monday.

thing we can do to ensure life returning to normalcy is seeing as many people vaccinated as possibly can be. Any effort we can make to see that that occurs, we think is worth everybody's interest, our own as well as everybody else's."

Kimball had a similar reason for volunteering.

"We are part of this community," he said. "We saw it as a way of honoring our community, but also ensuring that more people get the vaccine. When you hear that a third or quarter of the population are thinking of turning it down, that's pretty scary. With the effort here, we got essentially 100% of the people who were eligible to get the vaccine, we'd like to see that in the community as well."

'A well-oiled machine'

The pharmacy and The Highlands teams have worked to make the whole process as smooth and efficient as possible. From pulling into the parking lot to exiting after receiving the dose, being observed and scheduling the second dose appointment, attendees can be done and on their way in less than 30 minutes.

"It's been great," Kleiner said. "A lot of cooperation. The administration has this down pat. They ironed out all the wrinkles and it goes very smoothly. It's like a well-oiled machine."

The flow starts and ends outside the clinic. Before

attendees even reach the parking lot, they check in with one of the security members or traffic volunteers. Once their name is checked off the registration list, the attendee is then directed to a parking spot. They then make their way through another checkpoint inside a tent and then into the multipurpose room.

Once inside the multipurpose room, they go through one more checkpoint with Eric Esterbrook, pharmacy owner. Esterbrook then directs the attendee to a sectioned off area to receive their shot and then they make their way to the observation area. When they have their second dose appointment card, they make their way back out and are directed out of the parking lot.

Greg Sell, 67, was a community volunteer, who helped direct traffic.

"Seeing the way this operates and seeing the flow and the efficient of this, it really kind of makes you feel like, wow, you really are making a difference," he said. "You see this steady stream of folks coming in to get vaccinated. I think that's a really good thing."

With how well the clinics have worked so far, and depending on vaccine supply, DeAcosta said he hopes to continue partnering with Esterbrook Pharmacy and providing these clinics to the community.



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Verna Dietrich turns 90 at blockbuster birthday party

By Ron Devlin

rdevlin@readingeagle.com
@rondevlinre on Twitter

The Dietrich family pulled out all the stops in celebration of the 90th birthday of its beloved matriarch, Verna Dietrich.

The grounds of the Kempton Community Center took on the aura of an outdoor movie theater in what was billed as a "Spectacular Drive-In Fireworks Display" on the evening of March 13.

An estimated 600 vehicles with about 1,500 people turned out for the over-the-top birthday celebration.

The crowd rivaled that of the Kempton Fair and the annual consignment sale, the two largest events held at the Albany Township fairgrounds.

Flanked by five poster-sized photos on the building, Verna waved to well wishers from an alcove at the entrance to the community center.

Leading up to a 15-minute fireworks display, visitors were entertained by a video of Verna's 90-year life journey with audio transmitted on their vehicle's radio.

Narrated by entertainer (and Mountain Folklore columnist) Dave Kline, "Verna Through The Decades" traces landmark events in a remarkable life that began on a Perry Township farm on March 13, 1931.

Educated in one-room schoolhouses, Verna rose from a forelady in a Hamburg garment factory to founder, with her late husband Willard, of Dietrich's Meats & Country Store in Krumsville.

Married in 1952, Verna and Willard ran a farm, tended a huckster route, started a stand at Renninger's Farmers Market in Kutztown and opened



COURTESY OF DIETRICH FAMILY

With her late husband Willard, Verna Dietrich founded Dietrich's Meats & Country Store in Krumsville in 1975. She turned 90 on March 13.



COURTESY OF DIETRICH'S MEATS & COUNTRY STORE

Verna Dietrich, founder of Dietrich's Meats & Country Store, celebrated her 90th birthday at a spectacular drive-in fireworks display at the Kempton Community Center on March 13. The 1,500 people who attended took home a snack box shaped like the Krumsville store.

the country store in 1975. All that, while raising three sons, Glenn, Lynn and Marlin.

In another video, posted on YouTube, Verna is lauded by friends, associates and personalities.

Kline, a former WEEU

Radio and Reading Eagle Company executive, celebrated Verna's "homespun charm" expressed in radio commercials she made over the years.

Berks County historian George M. Meiser IX sang "Happy Birthday." So did



COURTESY OF DIETRICH FAMILY

Verna and Willard Dietrich were married in 1952 and, together, founded Dietrich's Meats & Country Store in 1975. Willard has passed away, but Verna continues to work at the store. She turned 90 on March 13.

the gang from Trainer's Midway Diner in Bethel Township.

Author, folklorist and chronicler of haunted tales Charles Adams III told Verna she's "one heck of a woman who means so much to so many people." And, WFMZ-TV news anchor

Kathy Craine said Verna "epitomizes a work ethic from a bygone era."

Those who attended Verna's birthday party didn't go home empty handed.

Courtesy of Dietrich Meats, they took along a snack box filled with Dietrich's smoked meats and

cheese, Kutztown soda, Premise Maid candy and Dieffenbach potato chips.

And, as a keepsake, a bottle of wine from Clover Hill Vineyards & Winery with a custom label made up of milestone photos from the life of Verna Emma Leiby Dietrich.



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SENIOR ISSUES

Symposium focuses on social isolation among seniors

MediaNews Group

Continuing its work on the growing issue of social isolation among older adults, the Pennsylvania Council on Aging hosted a Social Isolation Symposium to present information and resources virtually to individuals who work with older adults, including caregivers, health care staff, stakeholders and the public.

Titled "Directions for Connections," this first-of-its-kind event in Pennsylvania featured nationally known speakers focusing on the impact of social isolation, and how to get older adults engaged to ensure their continued health and well-being.

The two-day event drew close to 700 attendees to participate in more than a dozen workshop sessions or select those of particular interest. Session topics included how to prevent social isolation among LG-BTQ older adults; supporting seniors to stay healthy during a pandemic; using

partnerships and collaborations to reduce social isolation; staying social in a socially distanced world; and getting seniors online.

"Social isolation is strongly correlated to poor health, increased mortality rates and dementia," said



Haeussler

PCoA Executive Director Faith Haeussler. "With the forced isolation of the COVID-19 pandemic, PCoA has been dedicated to looking at how we can intercept older adults and offer programming that embraces the daily realities of the pandemic but also provides a roadmap for where we go on this issue after the pandemic.

"PCoA was excited to bring together such a variety of expert voices around this topic, and I thank the PCoA's Social Isolation Task Force and Task Force Chair Janice Cameron for leading

research and exploration of this issue that helped shape this unique event. We hope this exchange of ideas and resources has fueled even more creativity, collaboration and ultimately more connection for older adults.

"Social isolation has been one of the top concerns for the Pennsylvania Department of Aging before and since the COVID-19 pandemic began. We have worked to gain a deeper understanding of the problem and created effective interventions through collaborations with our stakeholders and partners," said Secretary of Aging Robert Torees. "We were able to equip some long-term care facilities with communication devices for residents to connect with loved ones, establish a pilot program with Slippery Rock University students and faculty to engage with seniors to prevent isolation, and offer assistive technology devices to older adults living with a disability.

"I would like to thank the

PCoA for putting together this symposium, which offered great information for attendees to use to further assist with preventing social isolation among older Pennsylvanians."

Among the featured speakers were Patrick Arbore, Ed.D, founder and director of the Center for Elderly Suicide Prevention and Grief Related Services (CESP), who discussed loneliness and social isolation and the urban minority elderly; Dr. Barry Jacobs, a noted clinical psychologist and family therapist, who spoke about engaging, supporting and empowering family caregivers; and Im Ja Choi, founder and CEO of Penn Asian Senior Services (PASSI), who gave a presentation on how the center has been virtually connecting with Asian Pacific American older adults.

"We are grateful to the Department of Aging and PCoA for choosing such an important topic for the senior community, particularly the Asian Pacific

American senior population," Choi said. "We greatly appreciate the opportunity to share our experiences helping to ensure that our Asian Pacific American seniors elders did not experience the negative health outcomes related to isolation during the pandemic."

In April 2020, PCoA released the findings of a statewide survey it conducted to assess the status, needs and interests of older adults during the COVID-19 outbreak. Topics included food access, public risk factors and social connection. Conducted in both English and Spanish, the brief online survey drew more than 3,700 responses from older adults across Pennsylvania. The survey included questions on how often the older adult communicates with people outside their home, technologies they are using to connect, how often they are leaving their home during this pandemic and their primary reasons for doing so.

Findings indicated interest among older adults,

especially those who live alone, in connecting more, and in using technology to get services, connect with loved ones, attend religious services and enrich their overall lives.

The Pennsylvania Council on Aging serves as an advocate for older individuals and advises the governor and the Department of Aging on planning, coordination and delivery of services to older individuals. The Council's 21 volunteer members, the majority of whom are required to be age 60 or older, are nominated by the governor and approved by the Senate.

Members of the Council also serve as chairpersons for five regional councils with more than 70 volunteers, which meet quarterly. These regional councils gather information and insights on local needs and service delivery and report their findings to the Council. They also serve as resources for research and community outreach efforts.

ASK RUSTY

Social Security's 'first year rule' explained

By Russell Gloor

DEAR RUSTY » I am 63. My birthday is 10/23/1957. I currently draw a small pension of \$14,000 and a salary of \$75,000. I'm contemplating retirement at the end of April this year and I'd like to start drawing Social Security beginning June 1st. I've been told by friends that I won't be able to start drawing it this year because I will already have exceeded the maximum Social Security allows me to earn in a year. Is this true? Should I postpone my retirement until the end of the year? Please advise. — Confused by Friends

DEAR CONFUSED » Yours is a perfect example of why you should always check with a reputable source when receiving Social Security advice from friends.

Whenever Social Security benefits are claimed before reaching full retirement age (FRA), the so-called "earnings test" applies. This sets an earnings limit, which for 2021 is \$18,960 annually — an amount you will have exceeded by the time you start your SS benefits in June. However, Social Security also has a special "first year" rule which applies to anyone who claims early Social Security benefits mid-year.

The first-year rule essen-

tially waives using the annual earnings limit in your first year and, instead, applies a monthly earnings limit for the remainder of the year after your benefits start. The monthly limit is 1/12th the amount of the annual limit, so in 2021 the monthly limit is \$1,580. Provided you don't exceed the monthly limit after your benefits start and during the period from June 2021 through December 2021 (and if you're fully retiring from work you won't), you'll not exceed the earnings limit during your first year collecting benefits. Note, your pension and other "passive" income doesn't count toward the earnings

limit; only earnings from working count. So essentially, using the "first year" rule means your earnings before you claim benefits won't count, including any final pay you receive in the month you begin your benefits.

Starting in 2022, should you decide to return to work, you'll be subject to the annual limit, which will be a bit more than the 2021 limit because the limit changes annually with changes to the National Average Wage Index. The earnings limit applies until you reach your full retirement age, after which you can earn as much as you like without jeopardizing

your Social Security benefits.

In the year you reach your full retirement age of 66½, your annual earnings limit will increase by about 2.6 times, further mitigating risk of exceeding the earnings limit in the year you attain FRA.

For awareness, if you were to return to work in any year between 2022 and the year prior to the year you attain FRA, and you exceed the annual earnings limit, Social Security will take back benefits equal to \$1 for every \$2 you are over the limit. In the year you reach FRA, if you were to work and exceed the increased limit, SS will take

back benefits equal to \$1 for every \$3 you exceed the limit by.

However, at your FRA you'll receive time-credit for any months your benefits were withheld because you exceeded the earnings limit, which will result in your benefit amount being increased slightly at your full retirement age. In this way, you may, over time, recover any benefits which were withheld because you exceeded the earnings limit.

Russell Gloor is a certified Social Security adviser by the Association of Mature American Citizens: <https://amac.us/social-security-advisor>.

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SENIOR LIFE

Now vaccinated, older adults emerge from COVID hibernation

By David Sharp
The Associated Press

PORTLAND, MAINE » Bill Griffin waited more than a year for this moment: Newly vaccinated, he embraced his 3-year-old granddaughter for the first time since the pandemic began.

"She came running right over," the 70-year-old said after the reunion. "I picked her up and gave her a hug. It was amazing."

Spring has arrived with sunshine and warmer weather, and many older adults who have been vaccinated, like Griffin, are emerging from COVID-19-imposed hibernation.

From shopping in person or going to the gym to bigger milestones like visiting family, the people who were once most at risk from COVID-19 are beginning to move forward with getting their lives on track. More than 47% of Americans who are 65 and older are now fully vaccinated.

Visiting grandchildren is a top priority for many older adults. In Arizona, Gailen Krug has yet to hold her first grandchild, who was born a month into the pandemic in Minneapolis. Now fully vaccinated, Krug is making plans to travel for her granddaughter's first birthday in April.

"I can't wait," said Krug, whose only interactions with the girl have been over Zoom and FaceTime. "It's very strange to not have her in my life yet."

The excitement she feels, however, is tempered with sadness. Her daughter-in-law's mother, who she had been looking forward to sharing grandma duties with, died of COVID-19 just hours after the baby's birth. She contracted it at a nurs-



Baseball fans gather in the Bullpen Club at George M. Steinbrenner Field before a spring training exhibition baseball game between the New York Yankees and the Toronto Blue Jays in Tampa, Fla.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

ing home.

Isolated by the pandemic, older adults were hard hit by loneliness caused by restrictions intended to keep people safe. Many of them sat out summer reunions, canceled vacation plans and missed family holiday gatherings in November and December.

In states with older populations, like Maine, Arizona and Florida, health officials worried about the emotional and physical toll of loneliness, posing an additional health concern on top of the virus.

But that's changing, and more older people are reappearing in public after they

were among the first group to get vaccinated.

Those who are fully vaccinated are ready to get out of Dodge without worrying they were endangering themselves amid a pandemic that has claimed more than 540,000 lives in the United States.

"Now there's an extra level of confidence," said Ken Hughes, a 79-year-old Florida resident who is flying with his wife for a pandemic-delayed annual trip to Arizona in April. "I am feeling good about moving forward."

Plenty of older adults are eager to hop on a jet to travel. Others are look-

ing forward to the simpler things like eating at a restaurant, going to a movie theater or playing bingo.

Sally Adams, 74, was among several older people who showed up for parking lot bingo in Glendale, Ariz. She felt safe because she'd been vaccinated and because she was in her car at the first bingo event in more than a year.

Once she fulfills the time to reach peak immunity, she plans to indulge in little things like eating out. She and her husband, who is also vaccinated, have only done takeout. Now, they feel like it will be OK to even eat indoors — as long as it's not

crowded.

"We'll probably go in and take the farthest table from other people just to be on the safe side," she said.

Indeed, many older adults are taking a cautious approach, especially when the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention declined to ease recommendations for travel.

Frequent traveler Cindy Charest was so excited about the prospect of jetting away for the first time in more than a year that she posted an airplane emoji with a photo of her being vaccinated on social media.

But she's taking a wait-and-see attitude after the

CDC recommended against nonessential air travel, for now.

"I think I got prematurely excited about it," said Charest, 65, of Westbrook, Maine.

But she's ready to jump when the time comes. She's watching for changing guidance.

Others are also cautious. "We're still in the thick of it," said Claudette Greene, 68, of Portland, Maine. "We've made a lot of progress, but we're not done with this."

Kathy Bubar said she and her husband are completely vaccinated but are in no hurry to push things. The 73-year-old Portland resident is planning to wait until fall before planning any major travel. She hopes to go on a safari in December.

"My goal in all of this is to not be the last person to die from COVID," she said. "I'm willing to be patient and take as long as it takes."

The Griffins were also cautious before they were reunited with their granddaughter.

Bill Griffin of Waterboro, Maine, didn't dare have close contact with family members until after being vaccinated because he has lung disease, heart disease, kidney disease and high blood pressure, all factors that pushed him into a high-risk category for COVID-19.

"Everybody wants to live for the moment, but the moment could have been very deadly," he said. "We listened to the scientists."

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