

FALL into some great times with MERA:

- Chicken Bake
- Happy Hours
- Bus Trips
- Mysteries to Solve
- Christmas Luncheon
- And More...



MERA Hometown News

And Calendar of Events
Items of interest to MERA Members
September 2026

Want to know more?
Check us out at
merasite.org

A Note from MERA's President

Most of us have certainly experienced a long, hot, dry summer so far; hopefully as we look forward to September we will get some relief. A reminder that our Chicken Bake will be on September 17th at Dietrich's Park! ENJOY the rest of the summer. Look forward to seeing you at the picnic.

Jim

MERA Calendar of Events

You won't want to miss any of these great MERA events!

- **MERA Annual Chicken Bake, September 17, 11:00 am** at Jim Dietrich Park. *Just \$5/person!* Includes Kauffman Chicken Barbeque lunch plus ice cream! **Deadline to register is September 7.** Reach out to **Rob Kehr**, 540 N 6th St., Hamburg, PA 19526. 484-388-0024
- **Mystery Bus Tour, September 23.** Where are we going? We are not telling! Come join us for a fun-filled day on an exciting Mystery trip? This tour will keep you guessing from start to finish which is exactly the point. It's so much fun to enjoy the scenery and the comfortable ride going from one place to another, just letting all the secrets of this day pleasantly unfold. We can't tell you where we're going, but you can be sure you'll have a great time. Registration and payment deadline was August 3. Reach out to **Barb Seidel** at 484-794-0857 or baseidel3523@gmail.com.
- **Happy Hour, September 30.** 4 pm at Liberty Tap Room, 237 N. Prospect St., Reading
- **MERA General Meeting October 19,** 1:00 at the Muhlenberg Rec Center located at 3025 River Rd, Reading, Pa. 19605. Who dunnit? October's meeting will feature a murder mystery program where we have to solve the crime! Light lunch will be served.
- **Happy Hour, October 28.** 4pm at Golden Oaks Bogey's Pub, 10 Stonehedge Rd, Fleetwood
- **MERA General Meeting November 16,** 1:00 at the Muhlenberg Rec Center located at 3025 River Rd, Reading, Pa. Get the latest on frauds, scams and AI from Dave Shallcross from the Attorney General's office. Light lunch will be served.
- **Happy Hour, November 18.** 4pm at Klinger's at the Airport, 2385 Bernville Rd., Reading
NOTE change of date due to Thanksgiving.
- **No Happy Hour in December: Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!**

- **New York City Bus Trip, December 3.** New York City ~ Christmas Do As You Please! Includes: Motorcoach Transportation. The day is yours to fill with the splendor of everything that makes New York City magical at Christmas. More details to follow.
- **MERA Annual Christmas Luncheon, December 10.** More details to follow.

MERA in St. Michaels Maryland

June 24 MERA Bus Trip Summary

by Barb Seidel

Mother Nature was good to us! We couldn't have asked for a better weather day!

St. Michaels History: Founded in 1672, St. Michaels has always been a shipbuilding town. From Native American-inspired dugouts to swift Baltimore Clipper schooners, the yards drew British fire in 1813, earning the title "the town that fooled the British." This evolution birthed the bug-eye, a schooner-rigged vessel that became the lifeblood of local watermen. Today, the legacy of skipjacks and log canoes remains St. Michaels' rich maritime heart.

The MERA group's first stop on our trip was the Crab Claw Restaurant in St. Michaels where we had a nice lunch of crab cakes and fried chicken. After lunch we had some free time to explore the quaint town of St. Michaels where the walkable streets showcased diverse boutiques, artisan shops, and galleries filled with coastal style, handmade goods, and thoughtful gifts.

Then we boarded the Patriot Cruise at the Chesapeake Maritime Museum for a 70-minute trip around Miles River discovering history and enjoying a narrated cruise. The Miles River is a 12.9-mile-long tidal river in Talbot County, Maryland, flowing into the Eastern Bay of the Chesapeake Bay. It is part of the Chesapeake Bay watershed and drains a watershed of 54 square miles, of which about 12 square miles is open water. The river's name comes from Saint Michael, the patron saint of Colonial Maryland, and it was originally called the St. Michaels River.

The group had a great time!

Remembering our Nation's Heroes

Wreaths Across America began more than 30 years ago to remind all of us how important it is to remember, honor and teach. Wreaths Across America is committed to teaching all generations about the value of their freedoms, and the importance of honoring those who sacrificed so much to protect those freedoms.

In 2025, over 3.1 million sponsored veterans' wreaths were placed on headstones of our nation's service members at 5,598 participating locations. Millions of volunteers helped place wreaths, a third of whom were children. And some of them were Met-Ed retirees! **Dave Murphy** and **Rick & Bonnie Shiner** have been active with Wreaths Across America for many years at the Indiantown Gap National Cemetery in Lebanon County. "All of us who place a wreath find it a very emotional experience," says Dave. "The effort calls to kneel in placing the wreath and then speaking the name of the veteran. This is to assure that they are never forgotten." The Shiners have also gone to Arlington National Cemetery to lay wreaths. "It is a solemn but beautiful site to see the wreaths on each and every grave," said Bonnie. Rick says that he and Bonnie have recently worked with local cemeteries like Gethsemane Cemetery in Reading. "There are hundreds of cemeteries that embrace the Wreaths Across America" program. Just check out the website."

Placing the wreaths has attracted a lot of volunteers over the years for the main event on a mid-December Saturday (December 19 this year). Dave says, "fewer volunteers are available when the

wreaths must be removed in mid-January. So, I help with that.”

To learn more about Wreaths Across America and how you can participate or support this poignant tribute to our nation’s heroes, check out this website:

<https://www.wreathsassamerica.org/pages/17107/Overview/>

“To be killed in war is not the worst that can happen. To be lost is not the worst that can happen... to be forgotten is the worst.”

— Pierre Claeys (1909-2003)

MERA’s Hometown News seeks to feature organizations where our members volunteer. If you have a nonprofit that you support with your time and talent and would like to see it highlighted in the newsletter, reach out to Karen Baxter, kbaxter@ptd.net

Bits & Pieces

Walt LaSota was appointed a Muhlenberg Township Commissioner in March to fill a term through 2027 due to the unexpected death of Commissioner Rick Hoffmaster. In this role, Walt is the Commissioners’ liaison to the Muhlenberg Township Fire & Rescue. He is also continuing his role as Vice-Chairperson of the Muhlenberg Township Authority Board (water & wastewater services) and Chairperson of the Muhlenberg Township Authority’s Customer Advisory Committee.

“It has been an honor to share with the community the life and professional experiences I was blessed to acquire while employed at Met-Ed and FirstEnergy,” says Walt. And it sure keeps the brain activity functioning at a high level!”

MERA Member Profile

Mark Shomgard

Mark Shomgard started at Met-Ed/FirstEnergy in the mail room/print shop in January 1984 and left Titus Station in December 2014 as Control Room operator bringing the last unit offline when the station was mothballed. In between, he’d worked all the jobs from boiler room to pump room to turbine operator to fireman. “We switched jobs every week; it wasn’t boring!” Although arguably the most stressful of the roles he worked, Mark’s favorite was the control room. “There were a lot of moving parts and the safety of my co-workers and the community were my responsibility.”

Mark studied business at Lehigh Carbon County Community College then joined the workforce. While working at Titus Station, he completed the 4-year Fossil Operation Training Program and became a qualified power plant control operator.

After leaving Titus Station, Mark worked for Berks County in the facilities department. He just recently retired – for good – from that position.

Growing up in Fleetwood, Met-Ed already figured large in his life as his father Roy Shomgard ran the Reading Line Department in Reading for many years.

A devoted outdoorsman, Mark likes nothing better than fishing in the Chesapeake for striped bass, catfish or shad fish. He also goes to New Jersey to fish for striped bass and sea bass. Mark does some snowmobiling, hiking and biking as well! He enjoys music and dancing and follows his friend’s band *The Lovelace 70s Band*. He volunteers with the facilities committee at his church.

“Now that I am truly retired, with no set schedule, I plan to travel more,” says Mark. “I’d like to go out west. Also, north to Montreal and Quebec. Maybe even take some MERA bus trips!”

He has a destination he'd like to recommend to his fellow MERA members: The Thousand Islands region which straddles the New York and Ontario border. "The area is beautiful! There are castles and Victorian homes to tour or cruise past. Go hiking, fishing, boating, kayaking. Or just hang out. I highly recommend Thousand Islands as a vacation spot and it is just a 5-hour drive away."

MERA Member Milestones Happy September Anniversary!

Larry & Shirley Biehl
Lori & Jim Endy
Dave & Sylvia Heckman
Gary & Sharon Heffner
Susan & Daryl Hendricks
Sonia & Donald Henry
Theresa & Greg Hilbert
Ron & Helene Horn

Michael & Lisa Hughes
Sharon & Steven Kerns
Michael & Sarah Mathias
Ray & Joyce Morse
Carl & Lana Pentz
Ken & Donna Peters
Bruce & Susan Remmel
Felix & Jennifer Rivera

Cynthia & Bruce Rowits
William & Annette Schaeffer
Paul & Ellen Schwartz
Maxi & Fred Shirey
Rod & Deb Ulrich
Christina & Michael Zezenski

Happy September Milestone* Birthday!

**A milestone birthday is one that ends in "0" or "5."*

Joe DeAngelo
Clyde Faust
Terrilyn Flasdick
Nola Henry
Lisa Hetrick
James Kelly
George Kunder
Barry Patterson
Bruce Remmel
Bernie Whitmoyer

