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MEMA HOMETOWN NEWS

Items of interest to MERA Members
January 2023



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A Note from MERA President

Welcome new Board members and returning members (although some of you are in new positions). It's 2023 already and we have a challenge or two ahead of us. I know we will be able to work through them. I hope all our members will have a "little fun" this year and 2023 will be even better than 2022!

Looking forward to working with you.

Jim

2023 MERA Board of Directors Out with Old/In with the New/Some Stay the Same!

2023 Officers:

President - Jim Zeiber

Vice President - Cindy Thomas

Secretary - Barb Seidel (new to the board, welcome!)

Treasurer - Dean Hollenbacher

Gary Pleiss joins the board as a new director. Welcome!

The following directors remain on the board:

Sandy Myskowski

Henry Robidoux

Karen Baxter

Nelson Moeller

Larry Lenhart

Clair Kramer

Becky Wingenroth

A warm and sincere thank you to Sandy Myskowski for her years serving as the President of our organization. She steered us through some unprecedented times (i.e. COVID) and we have emerged stronger, bigger and better! Sandy remains on the board as immediate past president.

Stu Degler, however, is leaving the board after 12 years of dedicated service to his fellow retirees. Stu was always willing to do what needed to be done with humor and wit. He will be missed!

That Rings a Bell!

I remember Christmas shopping with my Mom. Hearing the bell ring and the creak of the kettle as it swung on its flimsy tripod and seeing the encouraging nod of the Salvation Army volunteer. I remember, too, how good it felt to put some coins in the kettle and glow in the reward of my Mom's approving smile.

This year nine MERA members continued this decades-long tradition and rang the bell at the Berkshire Mall to raise funds to support the Berks County Salvation Army. The MERA Red Kettle Volunteers raised \$304.40 to help the Salvation Army provide services to those in need. That earns them many approving smiles from all of us! A big thank you to Kathy Seyler for organizing this year's efforts and for our MERA bellringers: Ron Burkhart, Cindy Doaty, Tim Goughnour, Larry Lenhart, Carol Lied, Terry Norman, Kathy Seyler, Russ Thomas and Joyce Zeiber.

MERA Communications Move to Email Delivery

Recently, the MERA Mail Team conducted a survey to get member feedback on the monthly email delivery of the Hometown News, program and trip flyers and meeting minutes (collectively called the "newsletter").

78% opened the emailed survey and 43% of those responded to the survey. Overall, MERA members gave the monthly newsletter a 4.8 on a scale of 1-5. In the category of newsletter content, the members gave a rating of 4.6. Respondents said they would like to see more information about fellow retirees and more Met-Ed News. Communications team members are reviewing the many comments and suggestions to determine how we can continue to improve. "We are, of course, very pleased with these scores," said Walt LaSota co-chair of the MERA Mail Team. "And grateful to everyone who took the time to respond. You will help us get even better!"

We don't want to say goodbye.... It's Time to Renew your MERA Membership!

Renewing your membership is simple and inexpensive! *MERA dues are still just \$5.00!* Just follow these easy steps:

- Complete the renewal membership form. To find the form, just click on the image included in this email or you can find it on the website under "printable forms." If you don't have a printer, simply write down the information requested on the form on a piece of paper and send it in!
- **Make a check out to MERA for \$5.**
- Send the form and the check by January 31, 2023 to Karen Baxter,
2 Belgian Lane, Wernersville, PA 19565

THANK YOU for being with us for another year!

MERA Member Profile

By his own admission, Ralph Rhode has lived a charmed life. Born and raised in Lebanon, PA, he attended Cornwall High School and earned a 2-year electrical engineering degree at Harrisburg Community College. In 1966, he was stationed at the Vandenberg Air Force Base in California. He worked as an electrician on Titan 2 Missiles. While there, other sparks went off. He met and married a California girl, Marva. Fifty-four years and two daughters later they are still together.

Ralph started with Met-Ed/GPU in 1972 and retired in 2009. In between, much transpired. His first job was as a substation project coordinator in EC&M. Eventually, he came to Three Mile Island (TMI) to manage the information center. He left TMI to serve as an Industrial Representative. However, a couple days after the accident, Ralph got the call. "Could he return to his old post at TMI to help with communications? Just for a few days." Well, it was nine months later before TMI was finally in his rear view mirror. He served in several other roles and got a bachelor's degree from the University of New York before ending up in the position that he found the most rewarding: Economic Development. "My job was to travel the state, the country and eventually to other countries to attract business to our service areas in Pennsylvania. More business in PA meant more business for us." Ralph partnered with state-wide agencies and once accompanied Governor Tom Ridge on a trip to South America seeking investment in Pennsylvania. "With all that travel, Fred Hafer once told me my expense reports were bigger than his! But he seemed to approve!"

After some post-retirement part-time work for an engineering firm and for FirstEnergy, Ralph is fully retired now. He and Marva split the year between Lebanon and Myrtle Beach. He golfs three times a week. When asked if he was any good at golf, Ralph replied "I'm okay. Probably better than most guys my age but not great!" He is a member of the Calvary Chapel Church and loves periodically reuniting with fellow Met-Ed/GPU co-workers.

His advice to others: "If you can, don't wait until your body gives out before you retire. Make sure you have some energy left to invest in yourself." His recommendation to fellow retirees: Check out The Green Dragon Market in Ephrata and the Roots Country Market & Auction in Manheim. "Marva and I go regularly and it is always a fun day out. We bring home local produce, great bargains and all kinds of curious and unusual stuff!"

Trip Summary: Cape May at Christmastime

Thursday December 8, 2022

by Kathy and Denis Dorward

When we think of Cape May, New Jersey, images of the seaside resort with its pristine beaches come to mind. We discovered that Cape May also has a rich history and diverse architecture. Christmas in Cape May was an impressive display of Victorian Christmas structures and traditions. The Victorian era of the mid 1800s is the period of reign of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert, merging English royalty and German customs, such as the Christmas tree and hanging of the mistletoe.

An example of the Victorian influence was evident in our first stop: a guided tour of the Emlen Physick mansion and estate. The 18-room Victorian mansion was designed by American architect Frank Furness and built in 1879 for Dr. Emlen Physick, a descendant of a well-known prominent Philadelphia family (his grandfather was the inventor of the stomach pump). After completing medical school, he purchased 11 acres on Washington Street and built a carriage house and the 18-room mansion. Dr. Physick permanently retired as a physician at age 23 and continued to live in the mansion until he died in 1916 at age 61.

The mansion was set for demolition in 1970 until the Mid-Atlantic Center for Arts and Humanities restored and now maintains and operates the mansion as a museum. Today the organization goes by the name Cape May MAC, short for Museum, Arts, and Cultures. Many original furnishings were on display throughout the house.

On our way to dinner at the famous Cape May Lobster House, we turned on Beach Avenue and got a glimpse of the beaches and Atlantic Ocean. Delicious platters of crab cakes, stuffed flounder or chicken francese were served. At the end of dinner and before we began our holiday trolley ride through town, we were told stories of how many of these traditions began and sang holiday songs. We ended with a rendition of Twelve Days of Christmas. Each table, as a group, was assigned to sing one of the twelve days. The solo parts of Partridge in a Pear Tree and Five Golden Rings were handled magnificently by Lem, our bus driver and Larry. They may go on the road as the L & L Duo singing those classic hits.

We were then picked up at the Lobster House for a guided trolley tour of Cape May's historic streets to view the Holiday decorations and traditions. We learned more of their Victorian heritage and Christmas traditions as our guide pointed out the brightly decorated sights and sang a few more carols along the way. A perfect ending to an enjoyable trip back in time learning of the Christmas traditions that we take for granted today.

Welcome New Members!

We welcome new retiree **Rob Kehr** (referred by **Terry Hasenauer**)! Rob is the 29th new member this year. A record as far as anyone can recall! The credit goes to the many MERA members who recruited these new members. Anyone who brought a new member to MERA during the year was eligible to win a \$25 Visa gift card at a drawing held during the annual Christmas luncheon. **Fran Kopala** was the winner! Congratulations, Fran! Let's keep the momentum going right through 2023! Help us grow by bringing new members to the fold!

January MERA Member Milestones

Happy Anniversary!

Martin & Sandra Christman
Randy & Michelle Collins
Robert & Sandra Eidle
Michael & Suzanne Knarr
Gene & Christine Leshner
Richard & Carol Morganti

Dennis & Nancy Nagle
Gary & Lisa Pleiss
Ronald & Linda Reddy
Victor & Carol Rodriguez, Sr.
Bob & Judy Stump
Beth & Scott Wetzel-Hozey

Happy Milestone Birthday!

Patricia Barrick
Jean Bowman
Willard H. Flowers, Jr.
Barbara Hoch
Karen Michalski
Carl J. Pentz
Lynne Ravert
Art Salyards
James R. Wertley

*I'm really starting
to miss complaining
about the heat.*



Do you have any comments or recommendations for MERA? A program? Newsletter article? Please email MERA at meraberks@gmail.com.