

Monday, February 19
General Meeting 1:00pm
at Muhlenberg Rec
Center
To Bee or Not to Bee
The sweet, sweet tale of
Bitler Farm's Apiary.



MERA HOMETOWN NEWS

Items of interest to MERA Members
February 2024

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

A Note from MERA President

For all who wished for snow...ENOUGH IS ENOUGH!!!

Looking ahead to February: we have an interesting program on bees which will be presented by a local beekeeper. We will learn about the birds at a later date. 😊 The meeting will be held at the Muhlenberg Rec Center on February 19th.

Check out the flyer in this newsletter to get the update for the Anniversary Luncheon which will be held on April 25th.

Looking forward to seeing you there; a great meal.

Two more important reminders:

REMEMBER YOUR VALENTINE!!

SPRING IS JUST AROUND THE CORNER. (We hope.)

Jim

Board Members – Goodbye & Hello

Goodbye to **Becky Wingenroth** who ended her time on the MERA board at the end of 2023. Becky served as the Program Chair and introduced many inventive new ideas. For example: combining a hike with a happy hour; live music in Jim Dietrich Park; cookie and pie baking competitions and so much more. Becky, thank you for your dedication and creativity!

Hello to **Donna Goughnour**! Donna retired from her role as a supervisor in the Customer Contact Center in 2017. She plays a lot of tennis, loves to garden (she is a Penn State Master Gardener) and enjoys babysitting her granddaughters. She says, "I am looking forward to continuing the great efforts of the MERA board!"

MERA Member Bits & Pieces

One thing we know, MERA members are busy people. This column is all about keeping us connected by reporting quick snapshots of MERA member activities. We'd love to hear from you. Submit your items by emailing meraberks@gmail.com.

Melanie and Mike Hart will meet Minnie and Mickey Mouse when they go to Disney World in February to see their eldest granddaughter, Adalia, twirl down Main Street as a majorette with the Pottsville Area High School Marching Band in the Magic Kingdom Parade. **Richard and Vivian Faust** are a statistical marvel. Only one tenth of 1% of married couples can say they have celebrated their 75th wedding anniversary. Whew! Congratulations! **Clair Kramer** was recently recognized by the Kutztown Lions Club as Member of the Month. He has been a member for 55 years! He is a past club president and award winner. Clair has served on the Lions Ambulance for 18 years! **Cindy and Jeff Thomas'** son Andrew was recently promoted to Lieutenant Colonel in the U.S. Army. Thank you for your service, Andrew!

Hiking and Bird Enthusiasts Alert! Waiting for the Ice to Go and the Birds to Arrive MERA's Annual Trip to See the Snow Goose Migration

For many, an annual trip out to the Middle Creek Wildlife Management Area near Kleinfeltersville is a late winter not-to-be-missed natural phenomenon usually occurring after Valentines Day but before St. Patrick's. During this timeframe, large numbers of migrating waterfowl settle in at Middle Creek for a rest and refuel before continuing their flight north. In recent years, more than 100,000 snow geese, 10,000 tundra swans, 10,000 Canada geese, and a wide variety of ducks have stopped at Middle Creek. It's quite a sight...and a great honking sound too!

The trick is...the birds do not call ahead and let us know exactly when they are going to show up. It's a timing issue. The ice needs to break on the lake and the snow has to have melted off the fields. And the weather has to be right.

Bonnie Paparella, who along with her husband Ralph coordinates MERA's Hikes and Happy Hours, is carefully monitoring the Middle Creek landscape. **It is likely there will be some changes in the winter Hike and Happy Hour schedule to accommodate our fowl friends. Bonnie will send out updated information via email and on the MERA website.** If you are interested in joining us for this event and others, you can be sure to have the right information by getting your name on Bonnie's mailing list. Email bonniepaparella@yahoo.com or phone 610-207-0258.

If you haven't made the journey to Middle Creek for the annual migration, get on board with MERA's Hiking and Happy Hour. This is an easy walk, not too long, on a flat, paved path. You can even bring your dogs or pat someone else's.

MERA Member Profile

Henri Santoro moves through the world with vigor. Not to say that she hasn't had her fair share of struggles. Like right now she is a fulltime caretaker for her husband, Michael, who is ill with kidney disease. However, Henri keeps moving and moving forward.

But, lets back up. Henri started in the Customer Service Department staying only about a year before moving on to Titus Station. This was her favorite job, providing administrative and payroll support for the plant. After about 8 years, she moved to GPU corporate where she managed the air shuttle between Johnstown, Reading and Jersey. This was all done on paper back then! But before she left, Henri worked with IT to computerize the process. "Maybe," laughs Henri, "if I'd been using a computer I wouldn't have left that VP stranded in Jersey!" Well, in fairness to Henri, it was just the one time! Henri left the company in 1993 when her job was eliminated.

Henri was born in Indiana, PA, raised in Homer City and attended Indiana University of Pennsylvania. She met her husband in Harrisburg while working for the Department of Sales Tax and the couple relocated to Reading. She and her husband have been married for 40 years and have four children between them. She and Michael live in Florida. They moved there in 1995. They moved back to PA in 2000 to take care of elderly parents but returned to Florida in 2014. "Just don't go near the pond. We've got a resident alligator named Fred." Henri and Michael love Florida but they do miss the food in Berks County and the antiquing. "They don't really have antiques in Florida."

Ultimately, Henri was bored with retirement and worked in retail up until recently. "I've worked since I was 13 and, although I love the beach, how many walks on the beach can you take?" She also makes scented soy candles which she sells on Etsy. Henri loves to cook, especially Italian. She's fond of making spaghetti sauce from scratch using her Grandfather's recipe.

She advises her fellow MERA members to "live somewhere where you will be happy." And, "stay away from social media! It drains time away from you." She reminds caretakers how imperative it is to take care of themselves. Finally, she says check out the website Pinterest to get your creative juices flowing.

Christmas Luncheon Follow-up

Great to see a crowd of 115 people laughing and telling stories at MERA's annual Christmas Luncheon held December 14 at The Warehouse in Hamburg, PA. (Check out pictures from the event on our website, MERAsite.org under the photos tab.) The Christmas Luncheon is one of MERA's most popular events but each year it gets more and more difficult to find a venue that will serve a sit-down meal affordably. MERA's board will be sending out a survey to those who attended last year's luncheon to get

your input as we plan the 2024 event. Look for an email from MERABERKS in your inbox and, thanks in advance for responding.

FirstEnergy Foundation Distributes Surprise Grants

At the end of the year, The FirstEnergy Foundation granted surprise “Gifts of the Season” totaling \$60,000 to eight local Pennsylvania nonprofits that are working to make lives better in communities served by FirstEnergy. The recipients of this year’s gifts are organizations that provide support services to underserved and vulnerable individuals of all ages across Pennsylvania.

Three deserving non-profits in Met-Ed’s service area received grants:

- Easterseals Eastern Pennsylvania (\$6,667) – Easterseals Eastern Pennsylvania provides services to more than 3,600 children and adults with physical and cognitive disabilities, autism, and other social, sensory and developmental delays.
- The Vision Resource Center of Berks County (\$6,667) – Founded in 1929 by the Reading Lions Club, the center provides services to prevent blindness and enables about 600 blind and visually impaired Berks County residents to lead independent and productive lives in their communities.
- The York Jewish Community Center (\$6,667) – The donation will help the York Jewish Community Center (JCC) expand its Center for Learn and Play (CLP). The center is designed to meet the needs of children 3- to 12-years old diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder who reside in York County.

2024 Membership Dues are Now Past Due! Time is running out!

If you are one of the few that have not sent in your 2024 MERA dues...please do it soon! We will miss you if you go! *Remember, MERA dues are still just \$5.00!*

Follow these easy steps:

- Complete the renewal membership form. To find the form, copy and paste this address into your browser...

https://www.merasite.org/files/ugd/e7716b_bd5377e915a74fdbb692c12391e6d58c.pdf

- If you don’t have a printer, simply write down the information requested on the form on a piece of paper.
- Make a check out to MERA for \$5.
- Send the form and the check by February 31, 2024 to
Karen Baxter, 2 Belgian Lane, Wernersville, PA 19565

The Sunshine Report

MERA's own Sunshine Chair, **Cindy Doaty**, sends cards and notes to members who are feeling under the weather or need a kind word. Recently, MERA sent a sympathy card to the family of **Audrey Ulrich**, widow of **Rick Ulrich**.

If you know of a MERA member who needs some sunshine, please let Karen Baxter know at kbaxter@ptd.net.

Volunteer Opportunity

Think Spring! The Reading Public Museum is looking for volunteers to join the Arboretum Assistant Program. Gardening sessions are Wednesday mornings from 9:00 am until 12:00 noon, April through October. Volunteers are asked to commit to the equivalent of 2 Wednesday mornings per month (or approximately 14 weeks). The Arboretum Assistants work with a Penn State Master Gardener and will only be asked to accept tasks physically comfortable for them. To request additional information, contact Donna Goughnour, Volunteer Coordinator, by March 1. Email tstingrayg@comcast.net

If you know of a volunteer opportunity MERA members might like to know about, send your information to meraberks@gmail.com.

Welcome New Members!

A very warm MERA welcome to new members: **Suzy Peffley** and **Barry Hoch**. We hope to see you at a MERA event soon!

Remember, anyone who brings a new member to MERA during the year will be eligible to win a gift card drawing held during the annual Christmas luncheon. Help us grow by bringing new members to the fold!

February MERA Member Milestones Happy February Anniversary!

Cindy & Daniel Bausher
Richard & Patrecia Christ
Bill & Dianne Day
George & Nancy Fies
Doris & Willard Flowers
Thomas & Lily Lee
Mark & MaryBeth Mancias
Timothy & Barbara Nuhfer

Kathy & Lin Seyler
William & Barbara Smith
Virginia & Warren Snyder
Jennifer & Mike Stewart
Ken & Pat Templin
James & Susan Thomas
John & Leslee Wlodyka

Happy February Milestone Birthday!

Louise Batdorff
Bill Day
Lisa Hatt
Jeff Hite
Nancy Machermer
Joel Miller
Ralph Paparella
Lisa Pleiss
Nancy Speicher
Kelly Storch
Jeff Thomas
Helen Wilhelm
Oliver Wilson
Barbara Witman

"Why does February feel
like one big Tuesday?"

Todd Stocker



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