

MERA hosts Kauffman's BBQ Chicken Lunch on Sept. 21 at Jim Dietrich Park. To register find the form on merasite.org or call Clair Kramer at 484-256-7168. Deadline September 11.



MERA HOMETOWN NEWS

Items of interest to MERA Members
September 2023

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

A Note from MERA President

Can you believe it? Kids are back in school! It seems as if the summer just started! The Board is ready to get back to the tasks of planning for the coming year's events. As usual the monthly meetings will offer some interesting programs. Our Chicken Bake is in September with Kauffman's Bar-b-que catering. The Christmas Luncheon will be at a new venue and should be an outstanding time. I hope everyone had a good summer. Look forward to seeing you all!
Jim

MERA Hikes & Happy Hours – Something for Everyone

“Exercise makes you look good naked. But so does wine.” That is NOT the official motto of MERA’s Hikes and Happy Hours, but maybe it could be!

Both programs have been very popular with members, but organizer **Bonnie Paparella** would love to see even more come to the monthly events. Bonnie emphasizes you can participate in both the hike and the Happy Hour or just the hike or just the Happy Hour.

The dual events are held on the last Wednesday of the month. Hikes start at 2:00 and Happy Hours at 4:00. To get updated on the monthly site (as well as any changes due to weather), members are urged to join Bonnie’s mailing list by emailing her at bonniepaparella@yahoo.com. The information can also be found on merasite.org.

Retiree Happy Hours started years ago independent of MERA but it was Becky Wingenroth’s brainstorm to launch MERA hikes and marry them to the Happy Hour. Bonnie has been organizing the program for about two years. Bonnie’s husband **Ralph Paparella** assists. He is also the official photographer and makes sure no one gets left behind on the walks. The sites change each month. Bonnie looks for locations where an appropriate Happy Hour spot is within easy reach of nice walking trail or park. The events are deliberately placed all around the county so members can find a hike or a Happy Hour site close to them.

“I make sure the hikes are pretty gentle so that almost anyone can participate. If there is anything even mildly challenging about the walk, I’ll let people know well in advance,” says Bonnie. “Also, no special gear or skills are needed for the

hikes...or for the Happy Hours! The most important thing to remember about MERA Hikes and Happy Hours is... All are welcome!”

MEMRA Member Profile

Walter Axsmith spent a lot of his career underground. That is to say, Walter spent a lot of time engineering underground electric systems. He started at FirstEnergy in 1962 in energy services in outdoor lighting design. He moved on to underground construction and design then to a number of positions including district engineer in Hamburg, budget & cost analyst and eventually engineering supervisor. “My favorite role was when I was working for Henry Robidoux as a system distribution engineer. He gave me the flexibility to explore different methods of underground construction and try new solutions to underground service problems.” Walter retired in 1996.

He grew up in Pottstown and graduated from Pottstown High School in 1959. After a three-year stint in the Army, he enrolled at Penn State. As soon as he graduated with an associate degree in electrical engineering, his career at Met-Ed started. Walter persisted through nine years of night school and earned his Professional Engineering license in 1973.

Wilfriede and Walter met during his army service in Germany and married 60 years ago. They have 3 children, 5 grandchildren and manage a menagerie comprised of 2 goats, 2 cats, 1 dog and 5 chickens. “We finally put an electronic fence in to keep the goats under control otherwise they would eat everything!”

Once retired the Axsmiths hit the road, traveling to visit relatives in Germany and touring Japan and Morocco. A highlight of their travels included a trip on the Trans-Siberian Railroad through Mongolia, Siberia and St. Petersburg. They also made a very special visit to the Philippines where Walter’s father is buried. The elder Axsmith died there in March 1945 during World War II.

The couple also had some extraordinary adventures backpacking on Pennsylvania’s Susquehanna Trail, Black Forest Trail and the Appalachian Trail. They also hiked 100 miles of the Pacific Coast Trail in California. “We carried everything we needed – food and shelter – except water. We always had to find a water supply,” says Walter. “Altogether Wilfriede and I hiked about 400 miles.”

Volunteer work has been an important part of Walter’s retirement including time spent with The Berks Food Bank, Meals on Wheels and the Juvenile Probation Panel (working with juveniles with minor offenses). He’s just started tutoring RACC GED students in math.

When you know that Walter likes to cut grass and chop wood, you can expect that his advice to fellow retirees is to get active and stay active! Not just physically, but mentally too. Walter regularly enrolls in classes via CD from a company called The Great Courses. Among many others, he’s studied *History’s Great Military Blunders*, *the Real History of Pirates*, *Emergency Medical School for Everyone*, and *Peoples and Cultures*

of the World. “I’ve taken a wide range of classes and enjoyed them all. The best part is I can review the course material while I’m eating!” Walter recommends The Great Courses to his fellow MERA members. You can find more about these courses at www.thegreatcourses.com and your local library.

FE Transitioning from PSI to a Paid Apprenticeship Program

FirstEnergy Corp's Pennsylvania subsidiaries – Met-Ed, Penelec, Penn Power and West Penn Power – have hired a combined 72 graduates of Power Systems Institute (PSI), a two-year educational program that helps prepare the next generation of line and substation workers for FirstEnergy's 10 electric companies. This will be one of the last graduating classes of PSI as the company transitions to a new, paid apprenticeship program to best meet the needs of future line and substation personnel.

Met-Ed has hired 10 line workers and 4 substation electricians who completed PSI offered at Reading Area Community College.

To help address the continuing need for new line workers, FirstEnergy is transitioning to a paid apprenticeship program that will consist of more on-the-job training with seasoned bargaining unit employees, offer opportunities for relationship-building with local department personnel from the outset of the training program and continue with classroom requirements to gain a deeper understanding of the electric industry.

PA Dept of Aging Seeks Input on Master Plan

The Pennsylvania Department of Aging is gathering information and input to create A Master Plan for Older Adults. Pennsylvania is ranked 5th among the 50 states by the sheer size of its older adult population (3.4 million) and seventh by percentage (17.8%) of the total population.

The plan will help the Commonwealth build and maintain an age- and disability-friendly state so that all Pennsylvanians may live with dignity and independence.

To learn more about Pennsylvania’s Master Plan for Older Adults go to <https://www.aging.pa.gov/publications/MasterPlan/Pages/default.aspx>

You are invited to contribute your thoughts regarding the plan’s goals, priorities, and initiatives.

Submit your input by mail:
Pennsylvania Department of Aging
c/o Master Plan
555 Walnut Street, 5th Floor
Harrisburg, PA 17101

Or by email:
AgingPlan@pa.gov

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 sympathy cards to the family of member **Eleanor [Ellie] Merkel nee Reed** who passed in July.

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

Welcome New Members!

A very warm MERA welcome to a bumper crop of new retirees **Mario Andre, Kathy Campbell, Linda Coutts, Tammy Gindlesperger, Yvonne Gordon, Brian Lowe, Kim Lutz, Bernie Whitmoyer, and Kevin Wickman**. 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!

September MERA Member Milestones

Happy September Anniversary!

Larry & Shirley Biehl
Lori & Jim Endy
Richard & Rita Freymoyer
Dave & Sylvia Heckman
Gary & Sharon Heffner
Susan & Daryl Hendricks
Sonia & Donald Henry
Theresa & Greg Hilbert

Tom & Peggy Hombach
Ron & Helene Horn
Michael & Lisa Hughes
Sharon & Steven Kerns
Michael & Sarah Mathias
Ray & Joyce Morse
Donald & Kim Mummert
William & Louise Pammer
Carl & Lana Pentz

Ken & Donna Peters
Bruce & Susan Rimmel
Felix & Jennifer Rivera
Cynthia & Bruce Rowits
Bill & Annette Schaeffer
Paul & Ellen Schwartz
Maxi & Fred Shirey
Rod & Deb Ulrich
Christina & Mike Zezenski

Happy September Milestone Birthday!

Robert Arthur
Arlene Bonanni
Deloris Frederick
Stacy Hasenauer
Joseph J. Kasper
Marianne Kline
Donald C. Miller
Erma Miller
Carol Mohn
Manice Peace
Neil Rahn
Linda Reddy
Fred Shirey
Jeff Sterner
Ann L. White

Q: What is the best apple
for making apple pie?
A: **WHO CARES? It's PIE!**



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