

Special Program
On March 20 at 6:00 PM, MERA
will host Ukrainian native Dr. Tim
Medianick who will speak to us on
the situation on the ground in
Ukraine. Don't miss this very
unique opportunity. NOTE: This is
an evening program held at the
Mulhenberg Rec Center.



MERA HOMETOWN NEWS

Items of interest to MERA Members
March 2023

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

A Note from MERA President

As I write this, we are halfway through February and NO SNOW!! Snowbirds will soon be coming home. We have plenty to offer our members in the coming year. I hope you take advantage of these opportunities. We enjoy seeing you have a good time. Please make suggestions for something you like. We are here to serve you! We have great, energetic board members. Looking forward to seeing you at the next meeting.

Jim

Anniversary Luncheon

For years I wondered, whose anniversary is it anyway? I thought maybe it was a group celebration acknowledging members' wedding anniversaries. What did I know? Turns out, not much. The anniversary we are celebrating is our own! The Met-Ed Retirees Association was founded on October 16, 1980. Yes, at 43 we are well into middle-age. Every year, we gathered in October to commemorate our founding; it was a good excuse for a party (and still is). However, October was too close to the holidays so somewhere along the line, we moved our celebration to April. What the heck, we are retired! We can do whatever we want!

Well, maybe not *anything* we want. MERA does have bylaws which describe our purpose thusly:

The purpose of this Association shall be to carry on activities to provide a means of friendly association for retired employees, to foster among them a continuing fellowship and a spirit of mutual helpfulness; to maintain their communication with the company, and to participate in activities that are of service to the community, contribute to the progress of the Association and promote the happiness, well-being and usefulness of the membership.

This year's Anniversary Luncheon is April 27. For all the details, see the event flyer enclosed in last month's newsletter or check out the details on merasite.org. **Gary Pleiss**, new board member and luncheon coordinator, says "Get ready for some great Italian food and good times with your fellow retirees. Celebrate our anniversary and help us promote your happiness and well-being!"

MERA Member Profile

Bruce and Maria Balthaser are one of a handful of couples who are both retirees and members of MERA. Between the two of them, they dedicated 62 years to FirstEnergy/Met-Ed in a wide variety of roles. Despite that long history, they did NOT meet on the job. They met at Bruce's cousin's wedding. That was 39 years, three kids, eight grandkids and three great grandkids ago!

When Bruce retired in 2018, he was a line supervisor in Reading, but he'd also worked in the line shops in Hamburg and Easton. Prior to joining the line organization, he worked with industrial clients in Energy Services and managed the Good Cents program which worked to encourage new homeowners to build all electric homes. "That was probably my favorite role. People were happy and excited about building a new home." Bruce graduated from Penn State with a degree in electrical engineering in 1980. Before joining the electric company in 1984, he was a supervisor at several local manufacturing facilities. He received his Professional Engineer license in 1992.

Maria's first job, after graduating from Penn State in 1985 with a Business Administration degree, was as a probation/parole officer for six years. "This was good training for my work at FirstEnergy/Met-Ed!" Her roles included working in the Reading Business office (walk-in customers), revenue protection (theft of service) and revenue operations (collections). She eventually moved into the Program Manager role of energy conservation, and when she retired, Maria was managing the low-income programs for all the Ohio companies. Maria is also celebrating her five-year anniversary with her Little Sister as a mentor at Big Brothers/Big Sisters.

Although their life together brought them to the same company, they started in dramatically different places. Bruce is Berks County through and through. Their home is in the Hamburg area where Bruce grew up. Maria's family emigrated from Italy in 1972 when she was eight years old. "I'm a proud naturalized citizen of the U.S." Maria grew up in West Reading.

At this writing, Bruce and Maria are crisscrossing Florida in their 40' fifth wheel RV. The pair love to travel and have been all over the U.S. and the world (Europe, Turkey, Russia, Egypt, Caribbean – just for starters). Bruce likes to fish and hunt whenever he gets a chance and they both like to bike ride (especially with their new electric bikes). Bruce also enjoys riding his Yamaha Star Raider. Maria says, "We try to explore and do something different every day. I'm going to relax when that's all I can do."

Retirement gives them wonderful opportunities to be with family and to indulge their love of adventure. But it has affected each of them differently. "I just can't shake it," says Bruce. "No matter how hard I try, I wake up at 5:00 am. I've come to terms with it. At least I don't have to set an alarm!" On the other hand, Maria says when she retired, she truly left work behind. "Like flipping a switch. However, I'm lucky to still stay in touch with my work friends."

Their advice for fellow retirees, not surprisingly, is to see and do as much as you can! As for a practical recommendation, they suggest checking out the Instant Pot. "We are foodies! The Instant Pot is a great way to prepare meals quickly and stock the freezer with tasty, ready-to-go meals." And *that* gives them more time to have adventures!

FirstEnergy Earns 2023 Military Friendly® Company Award

For the eighth year in a row, FirstEnergy has been designated as a Military Friendly® Company by Military Friendly, a national organization supporting the U.S. military and its veterans. In Military Friendly's 2023 survey, published annually by *G.I. Jobs* magazine, FirstEnergy received three awards: bronze recognition as a 2023 Military Friendly Employer, designation as a 2023 Military Spouse Friendly Employer and ninth on the list of 2023 Top Ten Military Friendly Supplier Diversity Programs. The awards recognize FirstEnergy's recruitment, hiring, training and development practices for veterans and their families. "On behalf of the nearly 950 past and present service members of the United States' armed forces that are employed by FirstEnergy, we are honored and grateful for this recognition from Military Friendly," said Christine L. Walker, FirstEnergy's senior vice president, chief human resources officer and Corporate Services.

Weather Forecast: Sunshine Predicted

MERA's own Sunshine Chair, **Cindy Doaty**, sends cards and notes to members who need a kind word. Beginning with this issue, Hometown News will provide a list of the members who have received a Sunshine message in the past month (in this case, since the beginning of the year) regarding the loss of a loved one.

On behalf of MERA, sympathy cards have been sent to:

Karen Fisher (Mother-in-Law)
Michelle Frey (Father)
Family of Margaret Karbel

Family of Milly (Babb) Leiby
Family of Dee Salyards

Welcome New Members!

A very warm MERA welcome to new retiree **Rick Shiner!**

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!

March MERA Member Milestones

Happy Anniversary!

Walter & Wilfriede Axsmith
Forrest & Edna Blatt
Thomas & Deborah Fegley
Lowell & Catherine Kessler
Tom & Shirley Krick

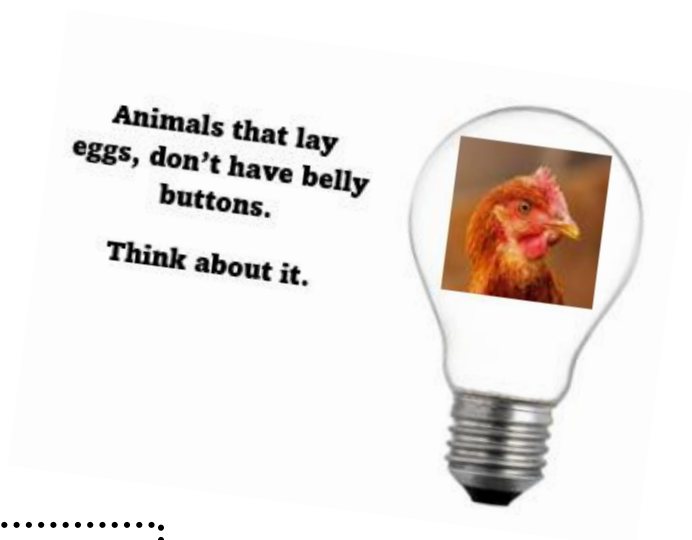
Denese & Tim Leedy
Shirley & Bill McClure
Eleanor & Dave Merkel
David & Debra Rutter
Barry & Elaine Sensenig

Happy Milestone Birthday!

Marshall J. Azrael
Robert Bates
Theresa Bates
Keith F. Golembiewski

Sonia E. Henry
Bruce M. Stempo
Pat Templin
Richard J. Zitrick

Ooops! We missed Marie Wright's Milestone Birthday in our February issue. Happy Belated Birthday, Marie!



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