



LARRY LEITZ'S SOUPED-UP '78 WAGON | Page 14

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What's Inside

Myra's dream cabin	3
A Hoosier library adventure.....	6
Sue Harris' two passions	8
The Healthy Geezer.....	10
Homer Bates met FDR.....	12
Larry's Sunbird	14
Bi-County buddies	16
Holiday tips & treats.....	22
A gingerbread guide.....	23

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She combined two passions into her retirement. page 8

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BY MARK MILLER

Myra's dream home (former Boy Scout Cabin, former CCC barracks)

This will be her 22nd Christmas in the cabin, more or less. Technically, there were a few years she was living in Kansas that she missed, but there were other Christmases many years ago when it was still the Boy Scout Cabin and she was only dreaming of living there. Those should count for something.

As a young girl, Myra Lydy lived only a few doors to the west on Spring Street in Bluffton but her father, Wayne, was a longtime Scoutmaster of Troop 140.

Today, Myra and her husband Rocky Myrtle are enjoying its warm, comfortable fireplace and rustic decorations. But Christmas is a special time of year.

"I really love to decorate for Christmas," Myra admits, "in fact I have way too much Christmas stuff. We really have accumulated so much stuff."

— — —

The building has a history of its own, but Myra Myrtle's personal history is so interwoven that she cannot imagine not being a part of it.

The simple structure at 315 W. Spring St. was originally built by Civilian Conservation Corps workers as a barracks

in what is now Ouabache State Park. In 1948, through the efforts of the Bluffton Kiwanis Club, the building was moved to its present location at a cost of \$1,000 with the express intent for the

Cover Story

building to become the home for the local Scouting program. It was at that time that

the stone fireplace was added, built as a donation by one of the Kiwanis members, Roy Biberstine.

Myra's earliest memories include playing in the cabin. "This could be my house," she would say to herself. She would visualize where she would place a couch and a kitchen.

Fast forward nearly 40 years: a marriage and work had moved her to French Lick in 1995 but Myra returned in 2000 after a divorce. She initially moved in with her parents, at which time she noticed that the cabin had fallen into some disrepair and the yard was not being maintained as well as she thought it should.

"I said something to dad about maybe he should go down and mow that," she

ON THE COVER and above: Myra and Rocky Myrtle are enjoying their retirement home that once served Bluffton Boy Scouts. The interior decor includes an old Troop 140 wooden sign (in right corner above) that was originally posted in the front yard. Myra replaced it with a wooden cut-out of a bear that she had crafted herself. (Photos by Mark Miller unless otherwise noted)



This photo from some time in the 1950s is part of the Scouting memorabilia Myra Myrtle keeps with her home. Handwriting on the back of the original identifies the boy on the far left as Larry Brown, the pianist as Larry Bachelor, with Ned Carnall standing behind him. (Courtesy photo)

recalled, “and that’s when he told me it was no longer a Scout cabin but had been donated to the local Habitat for Humanity chapter.”

She immediately knew that she wanted to buy it and convert it into a home, but had no idea how that would come about.

“I had a little bit of money but not much. I was working for Head Start over in Huntington at the time,” she said. She went to a Habitat meeting to make the initial inquiry, but answers were slow in coming. Meanwhile, she shared her dream with some friends, who suggested they all pray about it.

“So I said, ‘how about if we go inside to pray over it,’ since I knew how to sneak in,” Myra continued the story. “I thought for sure they would think I was crazy for even wanting to buy the cabin, let alone kind of break into it.”

“Breaking in” simply consisted of lifting an old barn door in the garage area and squeezing through, but once inside, her friends could also see its potential. “So we gathered in a circle right here (in what is now the living room) and said a prayer, and then they encouraged me to stop by every time I walked from my parents’ home to the park to stop and lay my hand on it and say ‘remem-

ber, God...”

She would later learn that the Habitat board wasn’t quite sure what they could do with the property. Remodeling it for a Habitat home would not meet the organization’s standards for square footage. Then, when it became public knowledge they were considering tearing it down in order to rebuild, there was a bit of a public revolt.

“I know there were several letters in the Banner about ‘how could they destroy that building?’” Myra said. “Men wrote in to say they had learned how to start a fire or pitch a tent there. So I really think in a way I kind of rescued them.” Habitat for Humanity’s bylaws forbade them to sell real estate that had been donated, but the board found a way to make it possible: if Myra could find and purchase a suitable empty lot, they would make a trade.

At first, her search was fruitless. “But I really think this was a God thing,” she said.

Another friend who was a real estate agent found a vacant lot available at the corner of Oak and West Market. It was the lot from which Craig Leonard had recently moved a stately three-story home out to Ind. 116. She made an offer of \$8,000, contingent on the lot being



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A plaque remains on the fireplace mantle identifying Roy Biberstine as the benefactor. It is generally believed that he also built the fireplace.



One of Myra Myrtle's favorite pictures is this winter scene, a gift from a former neighbor. She keeps it in a frame on her fireplace mantle. (Courtesy photo)

acceptable to the Habitat board.

"It was and it all came together," Myra said. Her childhood dream of owning the Scout cabin became reality. But there was much work to do.

— — —

Habitat for Humanity had been using the cabin basically for storage. There were sheets of dry-wall and other building supplies laying around. Myra began moving those out as quickly as possible because despite the cabin's rough interior, she wanted to move in as quickly as possible.

"You know, I loved mom and dad," she explained with a grin, "but moving back in with them when I was in my 50s, well, I was 15 again — 'Where are you going? When will you be home? Will you be home for supper?' I just needed my privacy."

The bathroom was not completely walled in and consisted only of a toilet and a sink. Myra continued to shower at her parents' house, but by Christmas 2000 was living there amid rather sparse furnishings.

"There was a bunk bed frame in a corner which Habitat let me keep," she related. "So I bought a mattress."

Having spent all of her savings to purchase the lot which she traded, Myra would need to borrow in order to get the remodeling completed. She approached several banks and was given

Continued on page 19



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Statewide library card launches literary adventures

BY TANYA ISCH CAYLOR

We visited Madison, Ind., at least three times before it occurred to us to check out the local library.

It was, as you might expect for an institution dating back more than 200 years to 1818, a fantastic source of history on this Ohio River town.



Hoosier Fun

On a whim, I pulled out my Public Library Access Card. We have used ours primarily at the Fort Wayne library, but I knew the card granted borrowing privileges at any library in the state.

Sure enough, we were allowed to check out DVDs, along with a few books and magazines to browse during our stay. That little card made us feel more intimately connected to the town — like we were experiencing it the way the locals do, and not merely as tourists.

That visit occurred nearly 20 years ago, but the cost of a PLAC card is the same now as it was then: \$65 per year. We've seen a lot of beautiful libraries since then, from the stained glass rotunda of the Wabash Library to the craftsman-style Eckhart Library in Auburn, with its fireplaces and stained glass windows. (We saw it before it burned a few years ago; the building has since been renovated.)

My card has been the source of many literary adventures, and not just on road trips.

I vividly recall the time, many years



Like so many historic buildings in Madison, the Jefferson County Public Library is meticulously maintained. (Photo by Bob Caylor)

ago, when I needed to kill some time in Geneva after dropping my son off at the ballpark. The downtown storefront library seemed as good a place as any for a bathroom break. What I found there — besides the anticipated comfy chair, magazine rack and a foyer display dedicated to hometown heroine Gene Stratton Porter — was a secret cache of my favorite childhood mystery series, “Alfred Hitchcock and the Three Investigators.”

I found all my old favorites, as well as a few titles in the series I'd never read before. These were original hardcover editions from the 1960s. In my excitement, I nearly missed the start of the ballgame.

The last couple of years I'd let the card lapse. But a visit to the Allen County Public Library with our grandson, who admired the aquariums and the giant revolving globe, reminded me how much I missed it. So recently I got another PLAC card. Soon after I found myself making another pit stop at the Geneva library, my first in many years.

The librarian informed me that I could return the book I checked out — yet another Three Investigators title I'd been unaware of, though it was published in 1966 — to the Decatur library if I wished, since both libraries have joined Evergreen, a consortium of more than 100 Indiana libraries that share an online catalogue and route vans. However,

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The Jefferson County Public Library in downtown Madison, dating to 1818, is the oldest library in the state as well as the Northwest Territory. Some locals say the elevator is haunted by a ghostly boy in a wheelchair, whom the elevator was originally built for when the building was a residence known as the Powell House. (Courtesy photo)

there is no county-wide library system in Adams County; the Berne library is its own entity.

Strange as it seems, that means this Wells County resident has more borrowing privileges in Adams County than the locals do. Equipped with a PLAC card, I'm not bound by county, city or township borders.

A couple of weeks later I took that book, "The Mystery of the Vanishing Treasure," along on yet another pilgrimage to Madison. There's just something about walking the streets of that old river town that soothes our souls when we want to take a break from the world.

Naturally we stopped in at the Jefferson County Public Library while we were there. We admired its seed bank, which was new since we were there last, and savored the newspapers, since there were none — not even a USA Today — at our hotel, a gorgeous \$22 million rehab of an 1884 riverfront warehouse.

With streaming services on our TV at the Fairfield Inn, there was no reason to borrow a DVD this time. We checked out a couple of coffee table books and a graphic novel instead. The librarian told us we could return them in Madi-

Continued on page 24

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Two passions

Sue Harris combined her love of quilting with her devotion to honoring WWII vets

BY KAYLEEN REUSSER

Some people who retire face unimaginable amounts of empty time. A lack of hobbies and interests can cause distress and depression.

After retiring from her position as a teacher of family and consumer science at Bluffton High School in 2010, Sue Harris of rural Bluffton dealt with the opposite problem — how to find enough hours in the day.

During the past decade, her time has been spent generally in two areas — helping to preserve military history in Wells County and performing one of her already developed talents used in teaching, that of sewing — specifically, quilting.

The first hobby was accidental. In 2013, while visiting the treasurer’s office in the Wells County Courthouse, Harris stopped to look at the large glass panels hanging in the hallway. The case for World War II was empty.

By checking with various sources, including the Wells County Public Library and Wells County Historical Museum, Harris discovered there was no complete list of local World War II veterans.

This type of resource was important to Harris, a lifelong resident of Wells County. She is part of a military family. Her father, Arden Kunkel, had been a Marine in the Pacific Theater in World War II and



Sue Harris of Bluffton holds quilt a she stitched a few years ago for World War II veteran Homer Bates. It contains cartoon panels reflecting Bates’ duties during the war. (Photo by Kayleen Reusser)



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grandfather Lewis Lowry served as a soldier in France during World War I.

By studying obituaries and online records, Harris began compiling information about World War II veterans in Wells County.

Today, she has a list of 2,400 names, including years and branches of service. This includes men and women who lived in Wells County at some point before or after the war. She is still seeking information and can be contacted via email at Harris22419@outlook.com.

Harris' quest to find information often caused her to meet veterans, including Homer Bates of Markle who later lived in Ossian. (See story on page 12.) He had been assigned as a waist gunner to B-29s in the 20th Army Air Corps 58th Bomber wing with the Burma-China-India campaign. He was a recipient of a Distinguished Flying Cross medal for completion of 33 missions.

The pair visited often and became friends. In 2013, Harris accompanied Bates as a guardian on an Honor Flight of Northeast Indiana. On two other occasions she helped him travel to military reunions in other states.

To show her appreciation for their

friendship and his service, Harris created a memorable gift for Bates using her skills as a seamstress, honed after many years.

After graduating from Lancaster High School in 1967, Harris attended Ball State University where she majored in home economics. Her first job was at Central Junior High School in Bluffton where she worked until 1976, instructing students with sewing skills which were part of the curriculum.

Sue married Mike Harris in 1970 and by 1976 had started a family. She stopped teaching to raise the couple's three children, returning in 1983, this time in the new Bluffton-Harrison Middle School. In 2007, she transferred to Bluffton High School and remained there until 2010.

With so many years of machine sewing behind her, Harris became adept at quilting with a machine. A quilt she made for Bates was made up of World War II aviation cartoons found online. Harris enlarged the comics before transferring the images to fabric. She added the panels to squares of coordinating fabrics before adding a border and

Continued on page 17



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The Healthy Geezer

By Fred Cicetti

Avoiding motion sickness

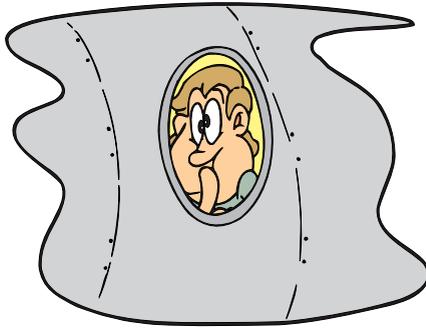
Q. *What causes motion sickness?*

A. Many people—including me—suffer nausea when traveling by boat, car or airplane. It also happens on rides in amusement parks and playgrounds.

The symptoms of motion sickness are caused by conflicting messages arriving at the central nervous system.

Different parts of your body let your brain know where you are and what you're doing. The inner ears let you know if you're turning, or moving forward-backward, side-to-side, and up-and-down. The eyes also monitor

the directions of motion and where the body is in space, such as upside down. Skin pressure receptors tell you what part of the body is touching the ground. The muscle and joint sensory receptors tell what parts of the body are moving.



If all the signals tell the same story, there are no problems. However, suppose you're below deck in a heaving sea. Your body is getting information that the boat is moving violently. But your eyes see the unmoving walls of your cabin. If you

are susceptible to motion sickness, this below-deck scenario is almost guaranteed to make you

look for a porthole to get rid of your last meal.

How about the example of reading in the car? Well, your body is picking up all kinds of cues that you're in motion, but your eyes see only the unmoving pages of your book.

Here are some tips to avoid motion sickness:

- Always ride where your eyes will see the same motion that your body senses. For example, sit in the front seat of the car and look out the windshield to distant scenery; don't stare at the rapidly passing telephone poles outside the passenger window. I prefer driving so I am forced to look straight ahead.

- If you're on a boat, go up on deck and watch the horizon. Request a cabin in the forward or middle of the ship, or on the upper deck.

- On an airplane, sit by the window and look outside. Also, choose a seat

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over the wings where there is the least motion. Direct the air vent at your face.

- On a train, take a seat near the front and next to a window. Face forward.
- Minimize head movement.
- Avoid strong odors and spicy or greasy foods immediately before and during your travel. Don't overeat.
- Don't smoke or sit near smokers.
- Before your travel begins, take motion sickness medicine recommended by your physician. There are over-the-counter drugs. There is also prescription medicine in an adhesive patch or in oral form.

There are other treatments for motion sickness that may benefit some people, but they have not been proven to be consistently effective. High levels of ginger have helped some. There's an acupuncture point of the wrist that provides relief of nausea during pregnancy and after chemotherapy, but there is contradictory evidence about its effectiveness in treating motion sickness.

If you would like to ask a question, write to fred@healthygeezzer.com.

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BRAIN EXERCISE

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How Homer Bates met FDR

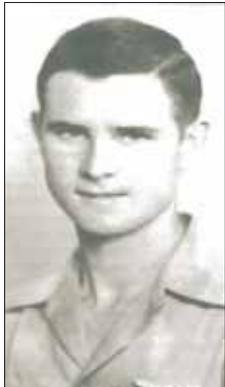
BY KAYLEEN REUSSER

In February 1944 Homer Bates' 20th Air Force flight crew was ordered to fly their B-29 to Washington D.C. No reason was given for the special trip with the Typhoon McGoon III. Bates and the rest of the crew hoped they would not receive a reprimand for their missions in the China-Burma-India Theater.

Upon landing at Bolling Field, the crew commander was met by General Henry "Hap" Arnold and his staff. Bates and the other crew members were greeted, then instructed to explain the aircraft to Arnold. He, in turn, would brief the President Franklin D. Roosevelt.

The crew did so and were surprised the following morning when, while performing a pre-flight check before returning to Asia, they saw a limousine pull up beside the plane.

It was part of the presidential motorcade. President Franklin D. Roosevelt was a passenger, along with members of his family, including daughter Anna Roosevelt Boettiger and her two teenaged children, Eleanor and Curtis.



Homer Bates served as a waist gunner on a B-29 with the 20th Air Force during World War II.

While staying inside the vehicle, due to his polio, Roosevelt began questioning the crew about the aircraft. Anna and the others ventured into the nose section. From her comments, Bates believed she was well versed about the plane.

The president appeared pleased with the aircraft. "That was perhaps the only time he saw a B-29 up close," said Bates.

The crew was relieved. The B-29 project to build the aircraft cost was in the billions of dollars, not far removed from what would be the cost for the A-bomb.

The president ended the session by shaking hands with each crew member



In 2015 Homer Bates (third from the left in the front row) accompanied by a friend and family, attended a military reunion with other flight crew members in Connecticut where they posed in front of a B-29. (Courtesy photos)

before being driven off with his family.

It was a heady experience for Bates who had enlisted in the Army Air Corps in 1942 (the name would later be changed to Air Force).

A native of Iowa, he tested high for skills needed to work with aircraft and was sent for technical training as an aerial gunner to schools in North Carolina, Illinois and Colorado.

Bates was assigned to the 20th Air Force 58th Bomber Wing and assigned a gun turret on a B-29.

Bates' first mission over Japan took place June 1944. "For more than a year it was a steady routine of dropping bombs and encountering enemy fighters

and heavy accurate flak," he said. His longest mission to Nagoya lasted 18 hours.

During the war, Staff Sergeant Bates flew 33 missions. For his bravery and contribution to the war effort he was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross and several other medals, including a Silver Star and Bronze Star. He returned home to live in Wells County. Before his death in 2016, he would reside with his wife and family in various locations in Wells County, including Markle, Ossian and Bluffton.

But, unlike many men who had been in the war, Bates had enjoyed military life and continued as a member of the

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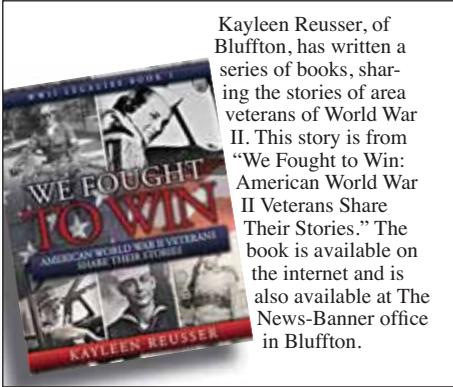
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Indiana Air National Guard from 1954-1961. He spent a year with the Air Force in France during the Berlin Wall Crisis, then re-joined the Indiana Air National Guard full-time until 1982, retiring as a Master Sergeant.

In 2015 Bates, accompanied by a daughter and friend, attended a military reunion at the New England Air Museum in Windsor, Connecticut.

He was proud of his military service. "I wouldn't change anything," he said.

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Photos by Bob Caylor

A rare '78 station wagon that's fun to drive

BY BOB CAYLOR

More than 40 years after it rolled off an assembly line near Youngstown, Ohio, the 1978 Pontiac Sunbird station wagon in Larry Leitz's garage probably looks as good — or maybe even better — than it did before it racked up its first mile on the road.

A Sunbird wagon in such great condition is exceedingly rare; Leitz knows of only five examples, including one in the Pontiac-Oakland Museum in Pontiac, Illinois. These

Sunbird wagons were made only in 1978 and 1979; only 8,000 were made in 1978. It's not a sports car or a luxury cruiser or a convertible — the types of cars more typically sought after by collectors. But for Leitz, 67, the car fits cleanly into a particularly nostalgic niche in his memories.

"Back in the early '80s, I had the Chevy version," he said, remembering

the 1978 Monza wagon he regularly took on road trips. "I enjoyed it. I always thought it would be fun to have another one."

Decades later, he finally found the Sunbird, the Pontiac version of the Monza. "It's an automatic with the 2.5 (liter) Iron Duke engine. It has every option, except the Buick V-6 engine: power steering, power brakes tilt wheel," he said.

Leitz, who is the parts manager at Hiday Motors in Bluffton, brought an occupational advantage to the task of

restoring the Sunbird wagon. Through his decades of work with parts managers in other GM dealerships, he has developed a network he can scour for original parts for the Sunbird or compatible with it.

"I enjoy finding things and researching things," Leitz said. In the course of restoring his own Sunbird, he worked his way into enjoying the hunt for parts for other Sunbird collectors he met through internet groups. He worked his parts network for them just as he had for himself in restoring his Sunbird.

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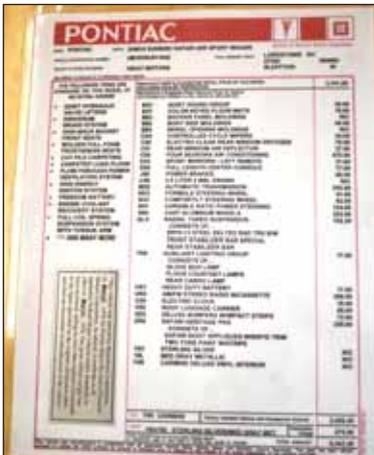
Leitz spared no effort in recreating the Sunbird, all the way to finding the new upholstery described in the window sticker as “carmine deluxe vinyl interior.”

He diverged from restoring it to its original look in only one respect: He always liked the look of the wide B-pillar between the front and rear side windows on a special edition of the Vega, called the Nomad wagon. He adapted these B-pillars to his Sunbird, creating a unique look for the car.

As meticulously rebuilt as the Sunbird is, “I’m not afraid to drive it.” During agreeable weather, he drives it about once a week. That helps keep his work of restoration art limber. And, of course, he enjoys it.

That enjoyment was his motivation, and it remains the point with the completed fulfillment of his nostalgic drive.

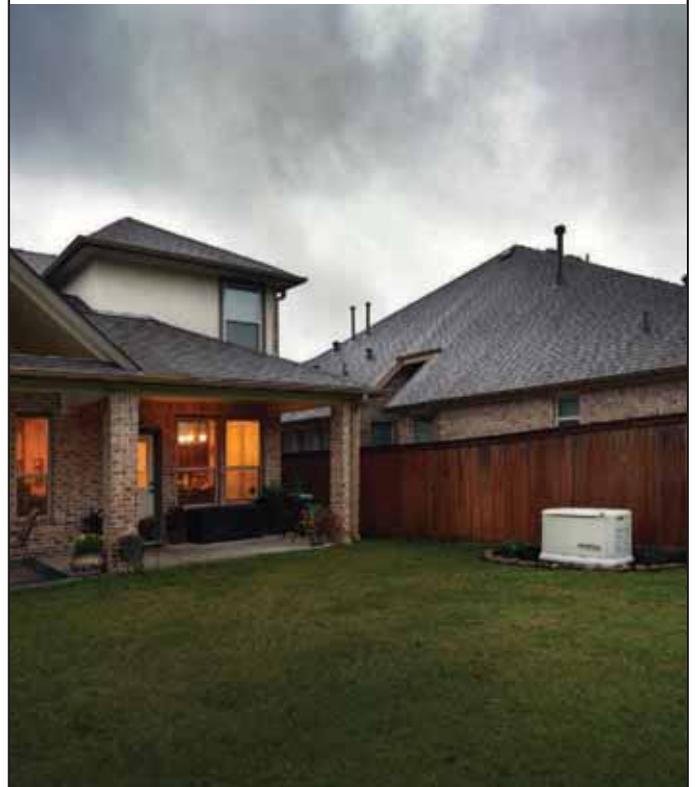
*Do you have a story to tell or know someone who does?
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Above left: Leitz added these B-pillars between the front and rear side windows — originally part of a special edition Chevrolet Vega wagon called the Nomad — to his restoration.

Above: The 2.5-liter “Iron Duke” engine in Leitz’s Sunbird wagon is a smooth powerplant for the small car.

Left: Leitz recreated the original window sticker for his Sunbird wagon. Loaded with options, its list price was \$6,442.25. Adjusted for inflation, that’s the equivalent of about \$27,000 today.

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Bi-County retiree appreciates friendship with her former client

BY TANYA ISCH CAYLOR

For 21 years, Joyce Ivins got paid to spend time with Christina McFarren.

As a Direct Support Professional for Bi-County Services, Ivins took McFarren, who has an intellectual disability, to the library, shopping and out to eat.

Though Ivins retired last year, the two women continue to spend time together — only now they do so as friends.

“Chris still calls me everyday,” said Ivins, who recently turned 76. “We’ve even gone out to eat a couple of times. She’s quite a gal.”

Retirement, Ivins says, “would be much more enjoyable if I could get around better.”

Health problems limit her mobility, so she doesn’t get out much. McFarren’s phone calls brighten her day.

“She tells me about things that are going on with her family, or something that happened at work or at church,” Ivins said. “She knows my son, so she’ll ask about him. I guess we talk about things that normal people would talk about.”

McFarren, 55, who’s worked at Richard’s Restaurant in Bluffton for 36 years, credits Ivins with helping her improve her math and reading skills.

“When I graduated from high school I was only at a second-grade reading level,” she said. “Joyce helped me get that up to a fourth-grade reading level.”

Now, McFarren said, she enjoys reading chapter books like Junie B. Jones. One day she’d love to be able to read the Harry Potter books, which her late mother used to read to her. She’d also like to learn more about dyslexia, so she can better understand what trips her up with math and reading and what she can do to get better at it.

These days McFarren works on her reading skills with another Bi-County DSP, Wilma Penrod.

Meanwhile, when she visits with Ivins, McFarren sometimes finds herself helping out her former helper. For instance, if they go shopping together at the Dollar Tree or Walgreens, McFarren said, “I’ll go in and get the cart and bring it out to her,” so it’s easier for Ivins to walk.



Joyce Ivins is enjoying her retirement from Bi-County Services. (Photo provided)

Ivins said she was glad McFarren recently suggested they take advantage of some coupons she had to get lunch at the Ossian Subway.

“I was glad she suggested it,” Ivins said, “because otherwise I just mostly use the drivethru.”



Chris McFarren has worked at Richard’s Restaurant in Bluffton for more than 36 years. (Photo by Tanya Isch Caylor)

“It’s nice,” Ivins said of the daily check-ins. “I’m sure for some it wouldn’t be. But we’re good friends.”

Do you have a story to tell or know someone who does? tischcaylor@gmail.com

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Two passions

Continued from page 9

backing.

Bates kept the quilt until his death in 2016 when his family returned it with thanks to Harris.

Harris also repaired a quilt for Bates. It was a completed quilt which needed a fresh binding around the edges and several interior pieces replaced after many years of use.

Harris has made quilts for family members and is teaching many of her 11 grandchildren the basic skills of sewing. Her son, Mark, used computer skills to help her make a design for a wall hanging displayed in her home.

Harris is an active member of the Bee Happy Quilt Club in Wells County. Along with other members, she has donated quilts to individuals and groups in the area, such as fire victims and others.

Blending her interests in the military and sewing, Harris has made dozens of patriotic quilts (solely red, white, blue fabrics are used) which have been donated to veterans at Norwell High School's Veteran's Day programs and other events. Other members of the Bee

Happy Quilt Club have contributed to such efforts as well.

Sometimes the club members work together. After Harris made 41 veteran quilts tops, they were quilted and binding added by club members. In turn, she has machine-quilted and sewn binding on tops made by others. "It is totally a group effort sometimes," she said.

On November 11, Veteran's Day, the Bee Happy Quilters presented 10 quilts to veterans at their monthly meeting. Harris has also made 15 lap quilts for the American Legion Auxiliary.

All of this activity means her home sewing room is filled with snatches of a myriad of colors and designs of mostly cotton fabric, some of which she has cut from men's shirts found at a thrift shop.

Harris continues to learn new techniques at gatherings of quilters called "Quilt Camps." Sewers share ideas, fabric, enthusiasm at the weekend sessions.

One type of project that has challenged Harris is a half-finished quilt. In many cases, it is aged.

"I may have to fix repairs that have been there for decades," she said. She may complete the item with a new bor-

der or complementary color so that in the end it looks new.

No matter the age of the finished item, in the hands of a talented seamstress like Harris, the right color, skill, and design can result in a fabulous finished product that will provide comfort, beauty and even patriotism to the recipient.

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How did Rocky meet Myra? Read all about it ...

Rocky Myrtle discovered a new career in retirement: writing. He began sharing stories from his 38-year railroad career with his children, who encouraged him to write more. He gathered more than 180 stories into a book he released through Amazon's Kindle program. They became so popular with railroad fans that he was encouraged to continue writing.

A native of Wichita, Kansas, Myrtle began working for the Santa Fe Railroad in 1970 as a general laborer. He retired in 2008 as a track supervisor, responsible for the maintenance of almost 200 miles of track.

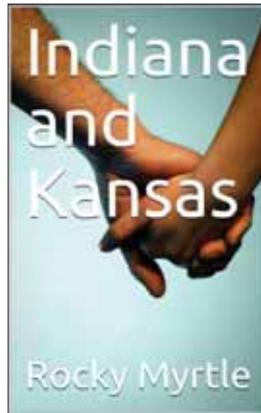
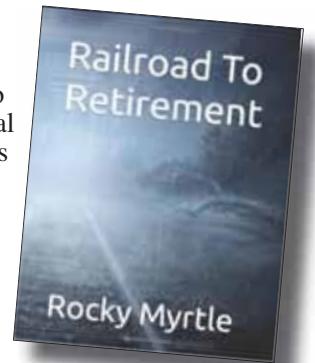
Some time during those years, he took a creative writing class at the encouragement of friends and discovered he had a knack for it. His instructor encour-

aged him to enter several short stories in some state-wide contests, in which he won several awards.

He posted his third book of stories from that career in early November, "just in time for Christmas gifts," he said. Sales continue to be strong for his first two, and that trend has continued for "Railroad to Retirement."

Finding himself single again in his 50s, he connected with Bluffton's Myra Lydy Barnes through an online dating site. He turned that courtship into another book, also available on Amazon: "Indiana and Kansas."

— Mark Miller



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Myra's dream home

Continued from page 5

what she called "huge stacks of paperwork" to complete. At a bit of a loss as to how to get this done, she was in one of the branches of what was then Markle State Bank and approached one of the loan officers.

"It turned out he was a former Boy Scout and when I told him what I wanted to do, he thought that was amazing," she said. That young loan officer was Jason Worman, who had grown up just a few blocks away from the cabin and was quite familiar with its history.

"The bank did an assessment which came out higher than I'd expected," she continued the story, "so I had enough money put in a kitchen and the bathroom and enough to get other things done."

Myra's nephew, James Baumgartner, had a construction company. He and his brother Matt began work in early 2001. While most of the original hardwood flooring was in good condition, the roof needed not just replaced but a new

roof and insulation was added on top of the old so that the interior open rafters could remain open. New windows were designed and made to replicate the originals and the fireplace was restored to be in working order.

In order to save money, Myra did a fair amount of the labor herself, including tearing off the exterior "shake shingle" siding which was no longer usable so that new vinyl siding could be installed.

The end result was more than Myra had ever dreamed about — the original pine wood interior siding, the open rafter ceiling and the stone fireplace has always felt like home.

Sometime in 2005, she and Rocky Myrtle met through an online dating site. When he first traveled to Bluffton, he quickly understood Myra's love for her home. He was still working at the time, so after their marriage, she moved to Kansas while he finished his career,

Continued on page 21

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Artistic endeavors keep Myra Myrtle busy

Bluffton's Myra Myrtle dabbles in art and poetry. "It's just something I've always had an interest in," she said.

The Boy Scout Cabin she converted into a home included a wooden sign out front identifying the Troop 140's home. She replaced that with a silhouette cut-out of a bear to match the cabin's rustic decor. "I just cut it out from a piece of plywood," she added.

The home is also filled with art from her friends or other pieces she's discovered over the years.

She wrote the poem below while working at the 4-H Community Center in about 2005.

The Old Log Cabin

Out at the Park
Lay a mantle of white
It sparkled at midnight
Well into the night

When out of the darkness
They came in row
Up to the old cabin
All covered in snow

It looked all alone
With staring window and door
From the top of its ceiling
Right down to its floor

The Grosbeak and Chipmunk,
Rabbit and Deer
Started their work
Without any fear

The Caretaker gone
For an evening of fun
Would not know what had happened
Until it was done

Together they worked
Well into the night
The poor little Cabin
Became quite a sight

With boughs, and berries
Pine cones galore
Couldn't look better
If bought in a store

The people stood round
A smile on each face
And wondered just how
This all had taken place

The secret well kept
Would never be known
Even though the Caretaker
Had never left home.

Myra Lydy Myrtle

Myra Myrtle's talents include painting watercolors. Her Scout cabin home contains several paintings of her grandchildren, although this one was based on a picture she found in a magazine.



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Continued from page 19

but of course held on to her beloved cabin as their retirement home. He retired in 2008 and the couple moved back to Bluffton, in time for Christmas of course.

“The annual Klondike outing was going on right before Christmas that year,” Myra recalled. “We invited Troop 140 to come over. They made some s’mores in the fireplace.”

Today, the couple enjoys traveling in their motor home, pulling a trailer that houses their Polaris ATV 4-wheeler.

“We like to be traveling about one week per month on average,” Rocky Myrtle explained. They have gone “4-wheeling” in Wyoming and Tennessee this year and most recently returned from an eight-day excursion to West Virginia. They plan to visit friends in Tennessee and Alabama during the coming winter.

“It’s really amazing,” Myra reflected, sitting in her admittedly unusual dream home. “It’s really a God thing, how my dream came to be.”

The writer is the editor of Senior Living. Do you have a story to tell or know someone who does? seniorliving@adamswells.com



Even the storage shed in the Myrtles’ back yard gets a Christmas treatment.

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Great homemade food gifts

Gifts from the heart are among the most coveted and appreciated come the holiday season. Hobbyists from all walks of life can turn their passions into handmade gifts, but few gifts may be as welcomed as those that can be eaten.

Cooking and baking ramps up during the holiday season. People can turn extra

time in the kitchen into opportunities to create festive treats that are ideal for gifting. But which items are the best of the best? Even though tastes are singular, these items will appeal to most foodies and others on your gift list.

- Jams and preserves: Fruit jams and preserves are versatile foods. They are as at home on toast and biscuits as they are as fillings in cookies and tarts. Jams and preserves can be made with relatively few ingredients and work well with seasonal fruits.

- Cinnamon rolls: Warm, sticky and full of aromatic spice, cinnamon rolls are the perfect comfort foods. These rolls do not typically have a long shelf life, so be sure to present them promptly before they get stale.

- Pancakes (or cookies) in a jar: If you have a fantastic recipe that you can't resist sharing, try turning it into a gift. Measure and package the ingredients into mason jars, tie with ribbons and



include directions for preparation and cooking.

- Mini bundt cakes: Fruit cakes may be a holiday standard, but bundt cakes make for great and traditional offerings as well. Miniature bundts filled with chocolate chips, dried fruits or even those soaked in a favorite boozy-butter glaze can be moist and delicious.

- Chocolate barks or fudges: Seasonal flavors can come to life in chocolate treats. White chocolate filled with peppermint pieces or dark chocolate and cherry chunks are tasty pairings. Break apart portions of the bark or cut the

fudge with cookie cutters and gift inside cello bags tied with ribbons or in cardboard candy boxes.

- Cocktail syrups: Create spicy or sweet syrups that are tailor-made for enhancing cocktails. Anyone on your gift list can then become a master mixologist.

- Shortbread cookie ornaments: Circular shortbread cookies can be decorated with royal icing to look like Christmas ornaments. They can be eaten or even placed on trees to complete holiday decor.

- Festive cookie pops: Cookie pops can be made by mixing homemade or prepurchased crumbled cake with frosting or softened cream cheese and formed into balls. Insert a lollipop stick and dip the balls into melted chocolate or candy melts. Sprinkles, nonpareils or luster dust can be used to enhance the covered pops.

Food gifts are perfect for the holiday season. Handmade treats from the heart show loved ones how just much you care. © MCS

Easy Christmas morning breakfast

Spiced Yogurt Muffins

(Yield: 50 servings)

- 6 1/2 cups Dannon plain fat-free Greek yogurt
- 4 cups water, room temperature
- 1 box (5 lbs) Gold Medal® Muffin Mix, Whole Grain Variety
- 3 tablespoons McCormick pumpkin pie spice
- 2 tablespoons McCormick Chipotle cinnamon

Combine yogurt and water in mixing bowl. Whisk until blended. Set aside.

Add spices to dry muffin mix in a large bowl. Add yogurt and water



mixture to the muffin mixture. Mix until just blended. Don't overmix.

Using a scoop, portion into greased or lined muffin pans. Bake at 350 F for 24 minutes, or 17 to 20 minutes in a convection oven, until the tops are golden brown.

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How to create a durable gingerbread house

Gingerbread cookies and houses are one of the many symbols of the holiday season, alongside Christmas trees and twinkling lights. In fact, few confections symbolize the holidays more so than gingerbread.

Many a child (or a child at heart) has spent hours carefully trying to create decorative gingerbread houses. Although gingerbread recipes span various cultures, gingerbread houses originated in 16th century Germany. The fairy tale “Hansel and Gretel” helped solidify the popularity of gingerbread, which became part of Christmas traditions.

Even though gingerbread houses can be fun to make, there’s no denying it can be exacting work — especially for those who strive for perfection. Pre-packaged kits attempt to take some of the guesswork out of the equation, but those who are crafting from scratch can employ these tips as they build their gingerbread houses.

- Go for form and not flavor. Few gingerbread houses ever get eaten, so focus



on finding a dough that will bake up rock hard as opposed to one that tastes good.

- Get the right icing texture. Pastry artist Catherine Beddall says royal icing is the preferred “glue” to adhere gingerbread pieces. Beddall says icing should be thick like peanut butter and not runny.

- Mind the dough. Do not roll out the gingerbread dough too thin or it may become brittle after being cooked. Always cut out shapes before the gingerbread is baked. Let the baked pieces

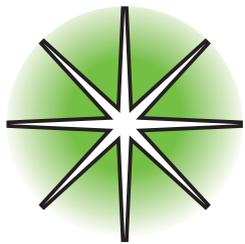
sit overnight to cool completely before using them to build.

- Patience is key. Allow the icing to dry for at least a couple of hours after adhering each piece and before moving and handling the house, says Beddall. Work in stages so that individual items can be decorated and allowed to dry. Then the walls can be put together, followed by the roof pieces.

- Kids likely will need help. Children may not have the patience or steadiness to handle complete gingerbread construction. They can decorate the separate pieces of the house while the components are laying flat, which is easier for kids. Adults can do the main assembly later on.

- Utilize a template. Free-handing may not be easy. Cut out templates using cardboard or posterboard for various gingerbread pieces.

One of the most important tips is to have fun. Don’t take gingerbread house making too seriously as a novice. Rather, enjoy the experience and the centuries-old tradition. © MCS



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INDEX TO ADVERTISERS

Biggs Rental Properties.....7
 Bluffton PH&E.....19
 Bluffton Roofing.....18
 Bluffton Woods / Silo Farms.....11
 Capri II Apartments.....7
 Christian Care Retirement Community.....Inside Front
 Dale, Huffman & Babcock Attorneys.....2
 Daniel's Jewelers.....21
 Decatur Dental Services.....17
 Edward Jones.....24
 Ellenberger Bros. Auctioneers.....18
 Emshwiler & Emshwiler.....14
 Experience Audiology.....4
 Family Ford of Bluffton.....6
 General Insurance Agency.....13
 Gersh's Carpet Cleaning.....9
 Goodwin-Cale & Harnish Mem. Chapel.....5
 Heritage Pointe of Warren.....13
 Hiday Motors Service.....18
 HomeCourt Home Care.....21
 Hott Family Dentistry.....23
 InTrac Relay Indiana.....1
 Jerry Flack & Associates..... Inside Back
 Kintz Insurance.....20
 La Fontaine Center..... Back Cover
 Moser & Son Heating & AC.....18
 Myers Funeral Homes.....18
 Potter's Lawn Service.....18
 Raymond James Financial Services.....16
 State Health Insurance Program.....12
 Steffen Financial Group.....19
 Steffen Group - Real Estate & Auction.....10
 Swiss Village Retirement Community.....8
 The Mattress + Furniture Store.....22
 Two Brothers Generators.....15
 Wells County Foundation.....11
 West End Restaurant.....17
 Zwick & Jahn Funeral Homes.....9

Solution to puzzle on page 11

8	1	6	9	4	7	5	2	3
4	9	2	3	5	8	6	1	7
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7	2	4	1	8	5	3	6	9
9	5	8	4	3	6	2	7	1

Statewide library adventure

Continued from page 7

son, nearby Hanover — or at any Evergreen library in the state, including those in Decatur and Geneva.

We took the books back before we left, but held onto the graphic novel, “Logicomix,” a profile of the philosopher and logician Bertrand Russell, to enjoy on the ride home.

I plan to return it, along with that mystery novel from Geneva, to the Decatur Public Library, which I’ve never visited before. I can hardly wait to see what I’ll find there.

The writer, a Wells County resident, can be reached at tischcaylor@gmail.com

An unusual feature of the Jefferson County Public Library in Madison is the seed bank, where patrons can get seeds for their gardens, with the condition that they return more seeds after their harvest. (Photo by Bob Caylor)



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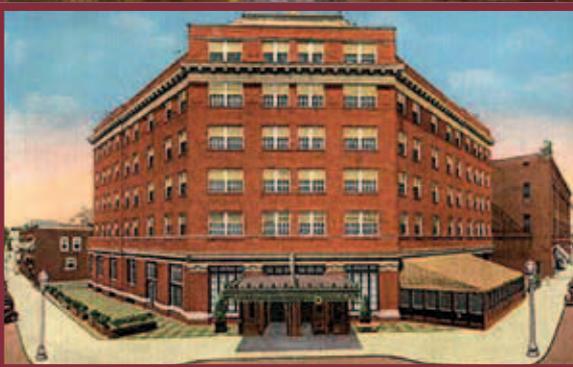
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