

# Messenger Bits from the Messer-Brandenburg Chapter



Vol. 1 Issue 1

December 2020

## ***Chapter Board Members:***

*David Bast, Jim Furrrie, Linda Dean, Rick Gattoni (Treasurer), Dennis Handrow (Past President), Bob Heger (President), Larry Hemdal, Wray Howard, Bob Lagerblade, D'Ann Lagerblade (Secretary), Dennis Mohrman (Vice President), Pat Nelson, Bob Reinke, Angie Rester, Martha Rolf, Tom Scott, Larry Stinson, Dianne Warrick.*

## ***Welcome Recent Retirees / New Members:***

Tamara Adelman (La Crosse Area Family YMCA), John Atwater (YMCA of USA), Mary Burckle (Manitowoc-Two Rivers YMCA), Jeff Collen (Racine Family YMCA), Michael Corriveau (YMCA of Jefferson County), Susan Larosee (YMCA of Metro Milwaukee), Joseph Milanovich (YMCA of Metro Chicago), Sylvia Purnell (YMCA of USA), Deborah Reid-Neal (YMCA of USA), Babette Thompson (YMCA of Metro Chicago), Richard Whitney (YMCA of USA)

## ***Messenger Bits: Member Stories***

### ***Hilda's Story by Denny Mohrman***

Back on April 4, our M-B Chapter of YMCA Alumni board members discussed ways we could stay connected to our most senior members during this COVID 19 pandemic. I have been keeping in touch with Hilda Masica Szabo and would like to share her update with you.

Hilda was born in 1932 in Czechoslovakia and celebrated her 88th birthday in July of this year. When she was 14 and after having completed the 8th grade, she was transferred by train to an American Zone in Germany following the end of WW II. During her time in Germany, she met her future husband Vasil William Masic. He was able to relocate to the US in 1950 and she followed in 1952. They were married later that year.

Bill was the YMCA staff member in their family. He served at Y's in Erie, PA; Altoona, PA; Harvey, IL and for 33 years in Springfield, IL. He retired at the age of 62 due to some health issues. They were married for 47 years before he passed in 2000 at the age of 76. Hilda said they loved Springfield because it felt like such a "small town atmosphere."

Hilda later married Louis Szabo in 2002 and they lived on the outskirts of Springfield until his death in 2018. At that time, she moved to a retirement village in Springfield. She has relatives of her husband's families who continue to check on her regularly.

***Messenger Bits: Hilda's Story Continued...***

Hilda says the YMCA Retirement Fund continues to send monthly checks and setting it up for her was one of the best things that Bill ever did. She has maintained her driver's license and hopes to continue it through age 90. She has not eaten out at a restaurant since mid-March. However, she says that when she goes out on errands with friends, they often drive through McDonald's to pick up burgers and fries.

Hilda cannot go to the Y to swim anymore because of her allergies to the water, but she has some exercise equipment set up in her garage at the retirement center where she resides. She has been supportive of the Springfield Y and is immensely proud to have purchased a brick in Bill's name to support their recently completed capital campaign. Like many of us, she is experiencing "cabin fever", but remains optimistic that "this too shall pass" and things will soon return to normal.



Springfield IL YMCA

***"On Staying Connected": Board member comments on calls with Chapter members***

***By: Pat Nelson***

"A few months ago, several of us were asked to make some phone calls to our Messer-Brandenburg members. Though talking on the phone was / is not one of my talents, I agreed to do it. So, I took four names and began monthly calls. It was hard at first, but I did it. It is now going into the fifth month of calls and I really look forward to the calls, connection, and friend updates (though none of us seem to be 'living it up or traveling'). I have enjoyed the calls. Volunteering to make these calls has been a blessing to me!"

Next issue, I will report on those calls and what is happening with our friends.....

***By: Martha Rolf***

"Before these phone calls, I had never met Kay Holtz or Gloria Patinos, but now I feel as if I have made two new friends. They are all wonderful people, and genuinely happy that the Y Alumni has reached out to them."



***Messenger Bits: Member Stories Continued...***

***Joyous Congratulations to David & Jean Bast***

Although 2020 has been highly unusual, there are two incredibly significant events occurring in their lives. On December 19 Jean and David reached a milestone and celebrated their **50th Wedding Anniversary**. If that is not enough, on or about February 12, 2021 they are expecting their first Grandchild. Parents, Rob and Mandy are carefully awaiting this and so are Jean and David!

They held a gender reveal party this fall in an open-air park with Mandy pitching the special ball and Rob (below image) with the bat releasing the gender secret!



50th  
Anniversary



***'On reconnecting' by Tony Fragale***

Hi Bob,

I enjoyed attending the Virtual Annual Meeting today and figured out I was attending a meeting other than one where I now reside. I lived in Chicago until May 1, 2020 and am now living in Virginia. I think a chapter in my area would be the one I attend going forward. Do you have a contact for the chapter that includes Virginia?

**It was nice getting a look at Rick Gattoni, my first boss at the Phoenixville (PA) YMCA back in 1975-78, when I was still in college in West Chester, PA.**

Best wishes,  
Tony Fragale

Editor's Note – we have connected Tony with Phil Morgan, President of the Weatherford Chapter



## ***Messenger Bits: What Have You Been Doing in 2020?***

***By Ken Buss***

Dear Y Guys/Girls,

Hope everyone is well. We are fine and since the YMCA reopened, I am there almost seven days a week working out. I continue to serve on several non-profit boards and committee's (Zoom meetings at least once a week). Joanne is the part-time pastor at Spring Creek United Church of Christ. The holidays will be unusual this year and hope a pray for a vaccine soon. Keep your spirits up.

Ken Buss

***By Joan Holland***

I have spent spring, summer and fall doing lots of gardening here in my retirement community. I am on the Landscape committee and as we have 33 acres of woodland trails, etc. there is plenty of opportunity for which I am grateful, as I love to garden. In preparation for winter, I have joined Alliance Francaise and am already enjoying lectures, workshops and conversation groups in French and English.

I hope you have all been well!

Joan Holland

***By Barbara Hinowicz***

I am learning to crochet in these times of social distancing. We have classes and many books for beginners. Tools and yarn are provided. I have attached (image below) a sample of my first project. Keeping busy is a good thing. Miss you all.

See you next year, God willing.

Barb



## ***Messenger Bits: What Have We Been Doing in 2020?***

***By Ann Nischke***

Greetings fellow Y Alumni! Dan & I are grateful for the opportunities to connect with friends virtually. We have also participated in some adventures like Road Scholar virtual tours and Silver Sneakers workouts. We even did a Tea tasting virtually - now that was informative!

We are healthy and God willing plan to visit Wisconsin the first two weeks of June.

Ann & Dan Nischke

***By Martha Rolf***

I am doing these things masked up and in adherence to all COVID 19 safety protocols:

- Working part-time at Hallmark
- Deacon projects through my church (caring contacts, community food distribution markets, etc.)
- Ringing bells and chimes. About 6-8 of us played hymns for shut-ins outside their homes (when the weather was warm)
- Part of a committee organizing a Zoom Reunion for our college freshman dormitory group of 24 in lieu of the on-campus reunions that were cancelled this fall
- Yard work
- Daily exercise (walking outside, golf, and swimming and cardio at the Y by reservation)
- Active member of our YMCA Alumni Chapter Board

I am NOT looking forward to winter and more strict restrictions that could close the Y again and non-essential businesses. I have loaded up on coloring books and jigsaw puzzles just in case. There are also inside home projects.

THE TWO MOST IMPORTANT  
DAYS IN YOUR LIFE ARE  
THE DAY YOU ARE BORN  
AND THE DAY YOU FIND  
OUT WHY.  
MARK TWAIN

***The following was shared by Martha Rolf on her experience in making telephone connections with the Holtz's this year. On December 13, Roth passed unexpectedly. We share our deep sadness and condolences with Kay and the Holtz family. Kay hopes conversations with Martha will continue.***

Kay & Roth Holtz: Roth's Y career started in Evanston, then to Ohio and back to Illinois where they became friends with Ken & Alta Thiel. Kay worked at Northwestern University. They retired to Florida but then came to Kenosha, WI to be closer to their daughter. They moved to a small, assisted living facility there. This past August, she and Roth celebrated their 73rd wedding anniversary and the staff at their facility had cake and a party for them. Kay and Roth have not attended any Y Alumni events for years, but they are grateful for the communications they get by mail and the phone calls from us. When I call, Kay always answers the phone. We have spirited conversations and she does not miss a beat.

 *In Memoriam* 



**Roth Brewin Holtz**, 97, of Kenosha, died at Aurora Medical Center, Kenosha, on Sunday, December 13, 2020. Roth was born in Evanston, IL, on Nov. 28, 1923, to Edward Herman Holtz and Lulu Belle (Brewin) Holtz. He graduated from Evanston Township High School in 1941, and he was managing editor of the 1941 yearbook. He attended Springfield College in Massachusetts until he enlisted in World War II.

He served in the U.S. Army from 1943-1946 with the combat outfit of the 14th Armored Division 62nd Armored Infantry Battalion and later with the Army of Occupation 5th Infantry Regiment of the 71st Division. He was stationed overseas in France and Germany.

Roth was introduced to Katherine "Kay" Warren at her sister's wedding. Upon his return from WWII, he became reacquainted with Kay, the love of his life. They were married in Glencoe, IL, on August 16, 1947, at the North Shore United Methodist Church. The couple raised three daughters in Evanston before retiring in 1988 and later moving to Clearwater, Florida, where they lived for 11 years. In 2000, Roth and Kay moved to Kenosha to live closer to one of their daughters. The couple celebrated their 73rd wedding anniversary this year.

While working part time at the YMCA and attending classes at Northwestern University, Roth completed his bachelor's degree in education on the GI Bill in 1949. He continued working for several different YMCA's full time across the U.S., for 30 years, but primarily stayed in Evanston. While working at the Evanston YMCA, he completed his master's degree in Psychology and Guidance also from Northwestern University in 1956. Employment in the YMCA allowed him to combine his love of working with high school youth with his love of nature and the great outdoors. Among his favorite activities were canoeing, camping, hiking, and downhill skiing. He led many teenagers on YMCA canoe trips in Canada and on ski trips. Prior to retiring he was the Director of the YMCA in Zanesville, OH.

Roth also belonged to several service organizations-the Optimist Club, Rotary Club, and the Y's Men's Club at the McGaw YMCA. Following his retirement from the "Y", he continued to work with youth as a paraprofessional at New Trier High School in Winnetka, IL.

He was a prolific, old-fashioned letter writer. With pen in hand, even in his later years, he kept in contact with former YMCA members, along with many other people whom he had met during his lifetime. He wrote weekly letters to each of his daughters, from the time they were in college until he was admitted to the hospital. Some of Roth's happiest moments were on his yearly Canadian canoe trips with a former YMCA camper until he was 85 years old. Roth also loved to read books from the public library, to go on long walks, to listen to his generation's music, and most of all, he loved his family.

## ***Messenger Bits: Remembering***

Roth Holtz continued,

Roth is survived by his wife, Kay; his daughters Barb (Ben) Richason of St. Cloud, MN, Carrie DeSantis of Kenosha, and Gail Corallo Williams of Peachtree City, GA; ten grandchildren, four great grandchildren; and several nieces and nephews.

A memorial service will be held later. In lieu of flowers, please send donations in memory of Roth Holtz to either McGaw YMCA, 1000 Grove Street, Evanston, IL 60201 or to Northwestern University, 1201 Davis Street, Evanston, IL 60208



**Beverly Brown** of Brookfield, WI

Went to home to her Lord and Savior on November 13, 2020 at the age of 92. Lovingly survived by Roger, her husband of 69 years. Loving mother of Lynnette (late Kevin) Nolan and Stuart (Colleen) Brown. Cherished grandma of Marissa Nolan, Michael Nolan, Sarah (Eric) Morong and Matthew (Jessica) Brown. Great grandma of Eliza and Lydia.

Mrs. Brown taught piano in Brookfield for over 40 years. Beverly was a Discussion Group Leader for Bible Study Fellowship. Beverly was active with Roger in Sheboygan and Milwaukee YMCA's.



Private Family Services were held.



*In Memoriam*



**Alta Ann Bowman Thiel** passed on July 28, 2020.

When asked her secret to longevity, Alta did not hesitate to explain, "Eat right, exercise, continue learning, and do something you enjoy." Alta Ann Bowman Thiel did all of this and more. Born November 2, 1926 in Ottawa, Illinois she began dance and gymnastic classes as a three-year-old. She continued being active her entire life. She attended schools in Ottawa, spent one year studying nursing and then enrolled at LaCrosse State Teachers College (currently UW LaCrosse) majoring in Health and Physical Education. It was there she met her husband of 59 years, Kenneth Thiel. After graduation Ken worked at the Evanston YMCA while Alta ran the Grove Street Nurse School with Betty Van Aman. She also worked at the Wilson Avenue YMCA and YMCA Camp Echo. A year after their daughter, Deborah, was

born the couple moved to Northbrook. A few years after the birth of their son, Steven, Alta began substitute teaching. She continued teaching full time in area schools starting with Physical Education and ending in the 4th and 5th grades. During these years she assisted her husband in starting the North Suburban YMCA. Throughout her life in Northbrook, she volunteered especially at the North Suburban Y, the International Y, The Village Presbyterian Church, Northbrook Historical Society, and Youth Services. She took numerous graduate courses. Many included international travel. It was on these trips that she met likeminded educators who shared her passion for travel and for learning. They formed a group they called The Travelers and continued their quest with visits and outings stateside. She and Ken also traveled with YMCA groups throughout the world. The couple enjoyed socializing with their peers and going to visit friends and colleagues throughout the states.

Alta was an organized, hardworking, caring, and generous person who was supportive and helpful. She was a true optimist. She is survived by her daughter, Deborah, son-in-law, David, granddaughters Rachel and Stephanie Larson, brothers Louis (Corinne) and Robert Bowman, niece Susan Taves and family and nephew Jeff Bowman and family. She was preceded in death by an infant son, parents, Louis and Clara Bowman, husband Kenneth and son Steven.

No service is planned at this time. Memorials can be sent to the Ken and Alta Thiel Strong Kids Fund at the North Suburban YMCA.



### ***'Tail End Tidbits': Bob's comments***

We first recognize the outstanding service of our Treasurer, Larry Hemdal who with his wife Carol have served our Chapter with distinction and participated together in countless Chapter programs.

#### **Larry Hemdal Recognized for Distinguished Service:**

"I, on behalf of the Board and the Messer Brandenburg Chapter members, thank **Larry Hemdal** for his outstanding service as Board Member, Officer and Treasurer. Over the years he has worn many hats in his service with the YMCA and Y Alumni. Whatever the role, Larry demonstrates what makes the Y so vibrant and effective. The passion to help improve the lives of others, the drive to do what it takes to get the job done effectively, accurately and on time and the strength to practice the gold standard of ethical behavior and honest communication. We are a stronger Y Alumni chapter because of the service and talents Larry and Carol have shared with us. We are deeply grateful for your leadership, support, and service".

The Messer-Brandenburg Chapter Board and Members present affirmed this recognition by unanimous consent at our November 11, 2020 Annual Meeting.

#### **Need Your Comments on 'Messenger Bits':**

This is our first issue of 'Messenger Bits' rejuvenating our Chapter Newsletter with a loose theme of "*What have we been doing this year*". As editor I hope you find the content interesting and that it stimulates personal interest in connecting with other Members. **Please share your comments** of what you like and what we should improve on, all comments are welcome and appreciated. The secret sauce of a newsletter is content and that is where your support is needed. When you do something that gives you joy, have that interesting conversation with a Member, or recall a Y memory, share it with me. [mbcofymcalumni@gmail.com](mailto:mbcofymcalumni@gmail.com)

#### **Members Elect 2021 Officers and Board:**

The Messer-Brandenburg Chapter held the virtual Annual Meeting on November 11, 2020. The Board members listed on page 1 were elected to serve for 2021 along with the following Officers: D'Ann Lagerblade – Secretary, Rick Gattoni – Treasurer, Dennis Mohrman – Vice President and Bob Heger – President. Thank you for committing to serve our Members this coming year.

#### **Membership Campaign is On:**

Rick Gattoni has our new bank account and P.O. Box established and you should have received either email or print communication from me on the membership renewal process. I sincerely hope you will continue as Members and look forward to the time we are able to safely meet in person. I welcome your suggestions to make Chapter programs more meaningful and will gladly respond to your membership questions. On the national level, planning is underway for a 2022 Reunion '**The Big Easy**' to be held January 12-15, in New Orleans and the **Travel Club** is preparing many new and unique travel experiences, see [ymcaalumni.org](http://ymcaalumni.org) for details.

### ***Support/Donations:***

**Thank you to Jerry Prado Shaw and Martha Prado** for a gift to the World Service Campaign, in memory of their dear friend Alta Thiel. Alta initiated with her husband Kenneth Thiel the World Brotherhood Fund. Following Chapter approval of a \$500 donation to World Service during our virtual Annual Meeting on November 11, 2020, they committed to match the Chapter gift in the amount of \$ 250.

I know you understand and value the significance of contributed support for charitable causes. With the many unexpected and unique challenges YMCA's face, I respectfully encourage you to consider a gift to the YMCA or YMCA causes most important to you. At the Chapter level we are equipped to accept donations to our Messer Brandenburg Chapter and YMCA Alumni National. Please contact me if you need assistance in making a direct contribution to the E.A.F. (Employee Assistance Fund), YMCA Word Service or Sioux Indian YMCA. Bob Heger: [mbcofymcalumni@gmail.com](mailto:mbcofymcalumni@gmail.com).

### ***Chapter Programs:***

Two virtual **Christmas Gatherings** were held this year, mirroring the pattern for in person Christmas events of past years. The first on December 9, focused on Wisconsin members and the second on December 16, Illinois members. Both events featured time for members to share personal stories of favorite Christmas traditions and memories. Like in person gatherings members asked about other members and shared updates as known.

Thank you to all participating Members, to Cindy and Dennis Mohrman for hosting the Illinois event and for sharing holiday music performed by the handbell orchestra with which Cindy performs.

As it becomes safe again for group gatherings, we will launch the localized small group gatherings as intended for 2020. Your patience and support are appreciated.

### ***National Service Project:***

"Plans for the National YMCA Alumni Service Project continue to move along thoughtfully. Representatives from all 17 chapters have met as a group monthly since June, with small task forces meeting in between.

The Committee has developed a mission statement and series of attributes they are using to measure each of the 33 proposed projects against. The first round of evaluating all projects against those criteria has been completed. In-depth analysis will continue to be developed in November and December.

The expectation is a project selection will likely be made relatively early in 2021. Then, the hard work begins. The Committee will begin sorting out the details of how to implement the chosen project and sustain it over years, including the critical piece of chapter and member involvement.

The current plan is to have the entire project details and its implementation ready to announce in the May 2021 printed / mailed issue of the CONNECTION".

**Linda Dean** represents our chapter on this project. [Lgdean28@gmail.com](mailto:Lgdean28@gmail.com)

***National Notes:***

The YMCA Alumni National Website is rejuvenated with a new look and provides a go to place for information on all Chapters, the Travel Club, National Service Project, Reunion 2022, Membership, and updates on the work of our National leadership team.

**Dale Packer's** term as President is ending and **Jean Carmichael** is the incoming President. She will be ably assisted by John Green - VP West, Jim Weaton - VP Central, Larry Garvin VP - East, Margaret Fogarty - Secretary, Bob Hastedt - Treasurer, Alan Hurst - Treasurer Elect, Cindy Koenig-Daggs - Assistant Treasurer, Kurt Kaboth - Assistant Treasurer WBF, and Dave Patterson – Membership. We sincerely thank Dale for the time, talent, and treasure he has shared with YMCA Alumni.

Did you know **International Service Corps** (ISC) is a program of YMCA Alumni. Members volunteer for short or relatively longer service stints and use their expertise to help YMCAs and their staffs and volunteers in other nations better serve their communities

For more information on all things 'Y Alumni', go to [www.ymcaalumni.org](http://www.ymcaalumni.org).

"We don't stop  
playing because we  
grow old; we grow  
old because we stop  
playing."

- George Bernard Shaw

Credits – Design by Cindy Mohrman; Editing by Bob Heger  
Content – submitted by Messer-Brandenburg YMCA Alumni Members  
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Messer-Brandenburg Chapter of YMCA Alumni, 2020