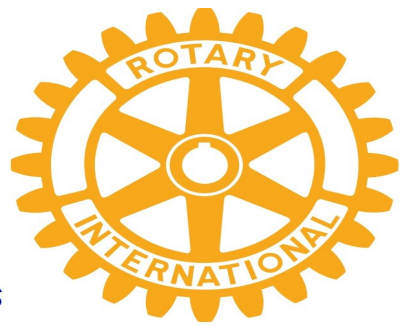




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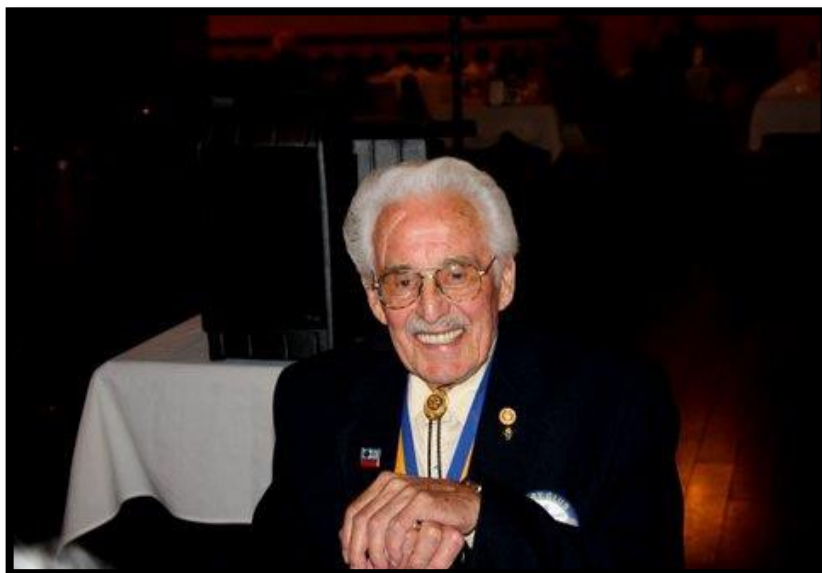
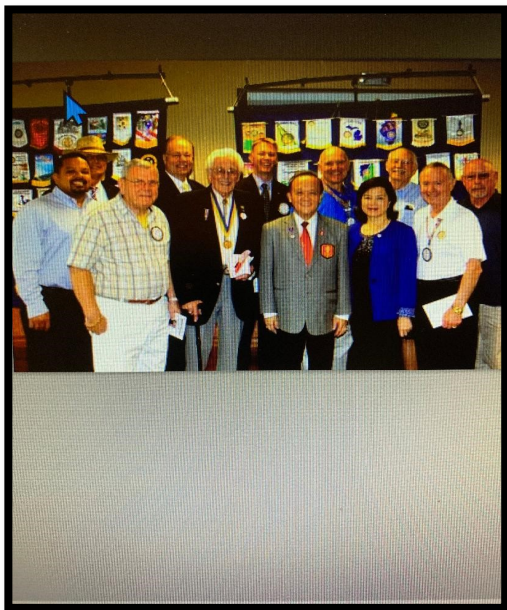
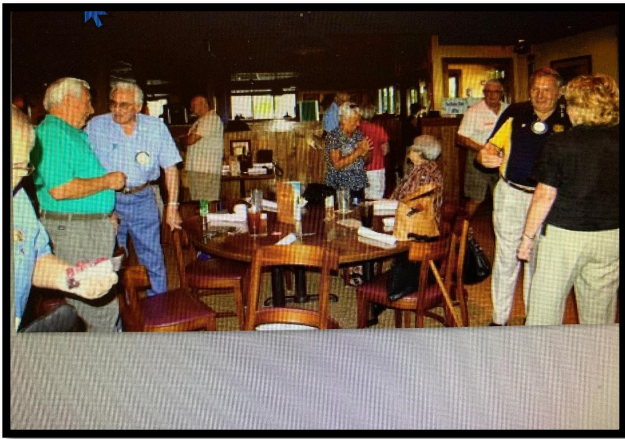
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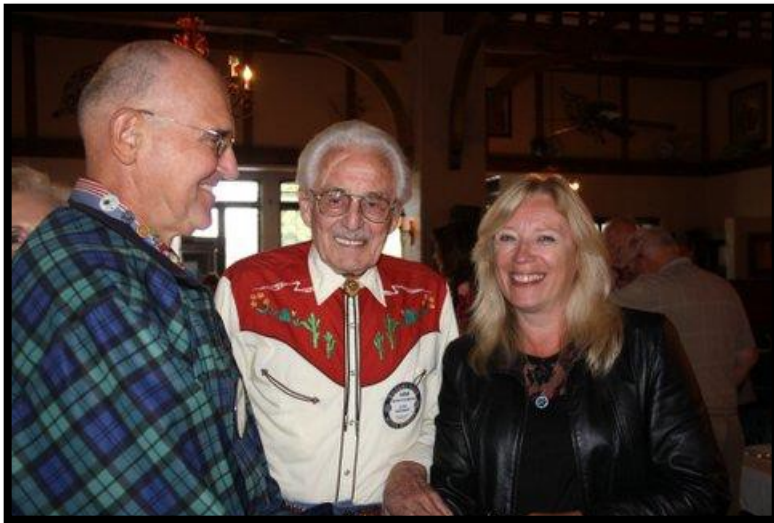
A Tribute to Hank



May 02, 2020

This evening at approximately 7:00 p.m., Hendrik J. van de Berkt ("Hank") passed away of natural causes after a long, steady decline. He was 96 years old. He was a Rotarian for 54 Years. With perfect Attendance for 54 years.





Hank Van De Berkt
By Sylvia Elinoff – Temple Shalom Sisterhood Holiday Outreach Committee Chairperson

Hank Van De Berk is a 96 year old Righteous Among The Nations hero from the town of De Bilt in The Netherlands who assisted in the escape of Jews, Christians, and Allied Soldiers from the Nazis during World War II. Hank accomplished this as a 19 year old member of the Dutch Resistance Underground.

The Righteous Among the Nations is an honorific term used by the State of Israel to describe non-Jews who risked their lives during the Holocaust for altruistic or unselfish reasons to save Jews from extermination by the Nazis

I was privileged to first meet Hank when he was a resident at the Steeplechase Retirement Residences about 6 years ago when I came there to do a holiday presentation with our Temple Shalom Sisterhood Holiday Outreach Committee. Hank was proudly sitting in the audience with a Star of David emblem pinned to his shirt with the saying "Remember. We Will Never Forget." Hank had this emblem specially made to show his love and respect for the Jewish people and to commemorate the work he had done as a very young man to save so many Jews and other people during the Dutch Nazi occupation.

After living in Steeplechase for 1 year with his wife Rina, the couple then moved to the American House where they resided for 5 years and finally moved to The Willows at Wildwood where Rina sadly passed away about 2 years ago. Hank still resides at The Willows Assisted Living facility where he receives the help he needs.

While living at these various facilities, Hank has enthusiastically attended and still attends our Temple Shalom Sisterhood Sukkot, Hanukkah and Passover Outreach presentations while always proudly wearing his Star of David emblem on his shirt.

Hank also proudly attends our Temple Shalom Holocaust Remembrance program each year and lights a candle during the candle lighting ceremony as a Righteous Among the Nations honoree.

To back up now, Hank was born in 1924 in De Bilt Netherlands and was the youngest of 4 children (3 boys and 1 girl). Hank entered carpentry school in De Bilt in 1940 and graduated in 1942. He then began working as a self-employed carpenter. Hank entered the Dutch Resistance Underground in 1943 and began saving people from the Nazis during the night while continuing to work as a carpenter during the day to "throw the Nazis off." Hank and other members of the Dutch Underground would rescue downed American and English pilots in the middle of the night before the Nazis could get to them. The Dutch Underground would then put the pilots and other people escaping from the Nazis, such as Jews coming from Belgium and Germany, into safe houses and then onto boats which would take them to England. Hank told me that he still has nightmares about his work in the resistance because it was so dangerous.

Hank moreover told me that his mother also risked her life to hide people in her house who were escaping from the Nazis during the war. (The apple does not fall far from the tree.) Hank calls his mom "The Mother Teresa of De Bilt.

When the head of the Dutch Underground, Dirk Vermey, was caught by the Nazis in Feb. 1945 and was sent to the Dachau Concentration Camp, the Dutch Underground broke up and scattered throughout the countryside because they knew that Dirk had all of their names and would be tortured until he revealed those names to the Nazis.

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So Hank found refuge in a little farm in the “boon docks” owned by relatives and stayed there until the war was over. Hank said that he was fine there and was very well fed. In fact, Hank joked that he was “the healthiest looking person walking around after the war.”

Dirk Virmey incredibly survived the war, in spite of the Nazis torturing him and breaking most of the bones in his body. Hank said that in spite of the severe torture Dirk was subjected to, he **never** revealed the names of **any** of the people in the Dutch underground and was awarded a special certificate by President Eisenhower “for gallant service in assisting the escape of Allied soldiers from the enemy.”

After the war, Hank returned home from his relative’s farm and signed up for the Royal Dutch Army with his older brother Lou. Soldiers were needed in the Dutch East Indies, and so that is where Hank and his brother were shipped.

Hank spent 3 years in the Dutch East Indies as a soldier in the Dutch Royal Army and then another year there as a civilian.

After 4 years in the Dutch East Indies, Hank returned to Holland and was hired as a master carpenter for the Royal Rotterdam Lloyd Shipping Company. He was based in Indonesia and worked for this company for 7 years, repairing the ships that would come in to port. While working for the Royal Rotterdam Lloyd Shipping Company, Hank also sailed around the world while working as a master carpenter for the company’s various ships.

During Hank’s last trip with the Royal Rotterdam Lloyd Shipping Company, he met a woman who worked for the very wealthy Ketani family in N.Y. She was responsible for hiring people to help this family run their 150 acre estate near Port Jervis, N.Y. She was so impressed with Hank that she offered him a job to manage this very large estate, and she moreover kept the job open for 2 years for Hank until he could get his paperwork done to emigrate to the U.S.

So Hank came to the U.S. in 1956 with his wife of 2 years, Rina, and their 4 month old baby girl. Hank ended up working for the Ketani family for 50 years as the manager of their large estate with 15 men working under him. Hank and Rina raised their beautiful family of 2 sons and one daughter on this estate.

Hank retired when he was 80 years old and then came to The Villages, FL with Rina to live near their daughter.

Hank would also like me to mention that he has been a member of the Rotary Club both in N.Y. and in Florida for 54 years with perfect attendance for 52 of those years. Hank is a very proud Rotarian!!

So that is the life story of this very remarkable man, Hank Van De Berkt. Hank is a very brave, intelligent, talented, selfless and kind man who has accomplished so much in his lifetime and is to be admired as a Righteous Among the Nations hero..

Saturday, May 02, 2020

This evening at approximately 7:00 p.m., my father, Hendrik J. van de Berkt (“Hank”) passed away of natural causes after a long, steady decline. He was 96 years old.

In addition to being a Veteran of the Royal Dutch Army, Hank was an active member of the Dutch Resistance, an underground network, saving the lives of countless Jewish families from the Nazis during the second World War by hiding them on rural farms in the Northern provinces of The Netherlands. He moved my mother and me to the US in May 1956. He was a talented Master Carpenter, and also a member of the Rotary International service organization for more than 50 years.

Hank outlived his wife of 64 years, Hendrina, by 17 months. He is survived by 3 children, 2 grandchildren, and 2 great-grandchildren.

He had always marched to the beat of a different drummer, lived life on his own terms and went out the same way. He is finally at rest.

After cremation, the ashes will be sent to Cuddebackville, New York to be scattered on the mountain where he lived and worked for 50 years, before moving to The Villages, Florida.

Paula Czohara