

ROTARY CLUB OF YORK – EAST - District 7390

Meetings: (please check website for changes/updates) **Tuesdays @ 7:30 a.m.** follow signs for venue
& every 2nd and 4th **Wednesday @ Heritage Hills Avenue Ale House from 5:30 to 6:30 p.m.**

November 2022 Newsletter

Editor: Friedel Liebe-Elser

www.clubrunner.ca/york-east



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Rotary Membership Anniversaries

*Thank you
for your continued service above self*

Calloway, Dan	24 years	Nov 13 1998
Beck, Chris	4 years	Nov 14 2018
Graham, Sandi	6 years	Nov 15 2016
King, Kyle	6 years	Nov 15 2016
Arvin, Jim	23 years	Nov 16 1999
Bene, Ada HONORARY	24 years	Nov 17 1998

York East Board of Directors 2022-23

President: Karen Comery
President-Elect: Elizabeth Wolf
Treasurer: Diane Yocum
Secretary: Friedel Liebe-Elser & Bob Elser
Past President: Sandra Graham
Committee Chairs & Members-at-large
Becky Disney – Fundraising & Giving
William Gierasch – Club Administration
Elizabeth Wolf – Rotary Foundation
Deb Klinedinst – Membership
Chris Izzo – Grant Committee
Greg Kern – Community Service
Tim Koller – Public Relations
Bob Straw – Vocational Service
Kris Pollick
Hunter Mink

Happy Birthday to you...

Stamm, Sheri	Nov 25
Wonders, Don	Nov 25
Graham, Sandi	Nov 30

*If your birthday is not listed, please contact
Bob Elser at navman9@comcast.net or
Friedel Liebe-Elser at friedel.liebe@gmail.com

Programs for this month

Our programs for the first 4 Nov meetings will be presented by the 4 nonprofit organizations that the grants committee has identified as finalists for our Dream Big grant. The organizations are LifePath, The Advantage Program, Logos Academy, and Stick N Move. Each organization will give us an overview of the services they provide to the York community. They will also summarize their grant application.

November 1. LifePath – Hybrid

November 8. The Advantage Program - Hybrid

TBD November 15. Logos Academy. – Hybrid

TBD November 22. Stick N Move - Hybrid

November 29. TBD - Hybrid

For ZOOM VIRTUAL MEETINGS on Tuesdays ONLY:

Instructions on how to join the virtual meeting will still be sent to members - or guests upon request - via the email meeting reminder latest each Monday.

The in-person meetings are held at Heritage Hills Hotels with the venue – location advertised on a sign outside - opening at 7 am.

All meetings on every 2nd & 4th Wednesday are in-person ONLY at Heritage Hills Hotels – please follow signs. This is a fellowship event only. There will be no program and no email invitation/reminder will be sent.

NEXT YORK EAST ROTARY CLUB BOARD MEETING

on Wednesday, November 10th, 2022 at 7:30 a.m.

In person only at Brewery Products at 1017 North Sherman Street

Remember us?

Yeah: We are, the 'Fiercely Protective
Puppy Army of Comery Residence'



We promised to keep you posted
About our wedding
But now we even have some additional
very exciting News for you:
We're all going to meet!

But first things first: Of course, our
Wedding with our mum as the Mother
of the Bride was - well better than ten
buckets of bones! It was phenomenal!

See for yourself, because:
Here comes the Bride!
Have you ever seen one that looks more
beautiful than Kiera on
her Wedding Day, the gloriously sunny
September 24th of 2022?



Here are the Bride & Groom!
Now as Mr. & Mrs. Justin Miller



And here they are the Newlyweds
Surrounded by their happy family!



But now we tell you something you
could never have guessed;
We're going to have a Party!!!

**So please save the date
For your President's
Christmas Party**

on Friday, December 16th
Our Mum Karen says:
"We'll Kick off at 6 pm
for a Party that never ends"

How is that for a lovely surprise?

Details to follow

Watch this space!

HAPPY



\$\$\$\$\$

I would be grateful if
once you have pledged your HAPPY DOLLARS

PLEASE send an email to
friedel.liebe@gmail.com

asap with the amount, your story and if possible, a photo.
Since it is impossible to get any of the above details during
hybrid meetings, your help is very much appreciated.

THANK YOU

Your backdated Happy Dollar Stories are always welcome
at any time!

Deb - My happy dollars for the last two weeks are for:
Christine Varanich, Vice President of Personal Lines, Collens
Wagner Insurance Company, joining Rotary
Stephanie Hoffman, Members 1st Branch Manager, joining
Rotary
Daniel Hoff, Fire Chief, York Area United Fire and Rescue
Nate Tile, Vice President York Revolution Business
Development, visiting our Rotary Club

We have been so blessed to have these folks join us and express
their interest! We will be voting on Daniel's application at the
next board meeting and hopefully will have one from Nate that
we can vote on at that meeting as well!

Chris - Pints for Polio was an awesome team effort.

Friedel – Thanking the team for this fantastic effort to organize
the PINTS FOR POLIO event



MEMORIES of Monday Night October 24th
York East Rotary Club
Along with the Victory Athletic Association

If you want a job done – ask the Rotarians of the Rotary Club of
York East. They know how to 'have a ball' – how to 'bring the
house down' – and how to raise funds to 'END POLIO NOW'
We were having a BALL – and what a treat to see some of our
very dear Fellow Rotarians smile as they enjoy this special
evening.



– even vying for the attention of Future Rotarians
– irrespective of age:



With 165 tickets sold and just about the same number of
Rotarians, their families, and friends enjoying the night out,
calling the effort of this team a success is a huge
understatement. Our guestlist included our two Guests of Honor,
PDG John Kram & DG Juliet Altenburg, who graced this event
with their presence.



PDG John, a Polio Survivor, treated us to a vivid display of
what being afflicted by the virus felt like, showing the
deformities those patients suffered, highlighting the resulting
often lifelong disabilities and indignities.

With Tim at the head of this committee he had the most
dedicated people on call.
Naturally Connie – wait a minute; why 'naturally'? – After all,
Connie is only one lady standing no higher than (well...) but
since she has all the hallmarks of a fireball, her input is beyond
anything anyone who aims for the impossible, can hope for.
And: Connie is not alone.



Her son James, who just happens to manage the Victory Club, offered the perfect solution to our request and we cannot thank him enough for accommodating all our wishes and for being the perfect host. But then, always quietly in the background, there is Connie's grandson Adian, the sunshine of her life.- here looking at his dad:



Our club members have had the joy to watch as he grew from the toddler who had just shed his nappies, holding on to his granny's hand, to becoming a kind, caring young man, always eager to help. Having embraced Adian as 'one of our own' for most of his life, we cannot wait for the day when he becomes our Fellow Rotarian.

It's difficult to mention here all those who have turned the original idea of our club's Pints for Polio event as almost every member was somehow involved.

Yet a few names must be recorded, such as Jin Jou donating some extraordinary pieces of valuable jewelry for the auction;

Cher for, once again, providing all the excellent photographic background, including fascinating video clips from Connie's international medical missions;



Vicky, in her customary gentle way in presenting the details that seemed to make it all the effort worthwhile, Bill & Nick – our welcoming committee, who greeted everyone with the most embracing smile;



Elizabeth, who had all the facts at her fingertips, delivering her passionate message applying her usual eloquence, 'Big Bob', being everywhere, where help was needed, Wendy, her benevolent smile giving nothing away about her admirable generosity by donating food and drinks for this event

Diane, our treasurer who managed to sell more tickets than anyone simply by being her charming self – and catching up on many long overdue hugs,



Karen with her boundless enthusiasm as our president and cheerleader, who invited her whole family – newly weds and all!



On (t)his 'night off', our very own Chief of Police, Todd, melted our hearts when he shared with us the story of his dad, who suffered from the effects of Polio – and the Post Polio Syndrome - throughout his life, without a single word of complaint.



The message that moved us to tears was when Todd confided: 'My Dad is My Hero'. We only hoped that the dad he recently lost, could hear his son's affectionate declaration of love.

And, finally, Tim, creating and chairing this strong team and holding it all together. Here are his own words:

For 35 years Rotary has had a goal of eradicating Polio. We have reduced polio cases by 99.9% since our first ever project to vaccinate children in the Philippines in 1979. Rotary members have contributed more than \$2.1 billion and countless volunteer hours to protect nearly 3 billion children in 122 countries.

Join us October 24th on October 24 in partnership with the Victory Club located at 471 South Ogontz Street York, PA from 5 to 9 pm for a fun filled evening including appetizers and non-alcoholic beverages, door prizes, auction items, music and entertainment. Additionally, beverages from the bar and items for dinner will be available. Every purchase will help raise money towards our cause. PLUS, every dollar we raise will get matched 2:1 thanks to the generous support of the Bill & Melinda Gates

Foundation. That's right...for every \$100 dollars raised, \$300 will support global eradication efforts.

Join us for this fun and extremely meaningful event!

A quick overview - provided by Tim - shows just how successful this event has been, and we are sending a HUGE THANK YOU to everyone involved

Income: Ticket sales	\$1,650
Raffle sales	\$1,100
50/50 sales	\$ 320
Auction sales	\$6,040
Contribution	\$ 350
Total Income	\$9,460
Total Expenses	\$ 983

Net Profit **\$8,477**

Which means after the

Gates Foundation 2:1 Match of **\$16,954**

Our club raised **\$25,431**

To.....



To view the photos – curtesy of Cher – on our website:

<https://portal.clubrunner.ca/6535/PhotoAlbums/2022-pints-for-polio>

Club Service

York Giving will distribute approximately **1,500 Thanksgiving meals** to families in need in York County. Boxes include a turkey and all the trimmings for a complete Thanksgiving meal that families can enjoy in their homes. Please contact Kris if you want to offer your help.

The **Salvation Army Bell Ringing** will take place on Nov 19th. A sign-up sheet is being circulated to our members to volunteer

We will be collecting **gifts for children at York Day Nursery**. More information will be coming soon.

BOB STRAW – LARGER THAN LIFE



An Interview

by Friedel Liebe – Elser © – 2022

Bob has a heart as big as a house where all the rooms are flooded by sunlight. And when darkness descends, all those windows are illuminated from within spreading warmth and coziness. In Bob's heart there is a room for every living creature, two-legged and four-pawed alike. There is a room for the homeless with nowhere to go; for deprived kids, their stomachs rumbling from hunger; for the elderly suffering from loneliness and despair; for aspiring, bright students with their whole lives ahead of them; for accident victims, lying in a pool of blood next to their wrecked cars; for lost shaggy mongrels as well as thoroughbred Rottweilers; for teenagers struggling to find their way out of a personal quagmire; for veterans trying to heal their wounds – those visible and those no one can see; for generations of little ones on their Trick or Treat runs around the neighborhood, knowing Bob has some special surprise for them; for a nursing home resident in need of a ride to the doctor's office; for the Salvation Army wanting someone to 'Ring their Bell' at Walmart's windiest corner during a winter storm; for people trapped inside while their home is on fire; for the little old lady who tries to cross the road; for a mum of five who can't pay her bill at the grocery store; for kids squealing with delight as their real-life 'Father Christmas' rocks them on his lap ... - and we are still only talking about a few of the rooms in Bob's heart.



Once you begin exploring the secret behind this extraordinary human being we are so fortunate to call him 'Our Fellow Rotarian', you will be surprised how easy it seems for Bob to give his all.

Being Bob, he always knew how to make the all-important First Impression, even before he saw the light of day for the very first time. While his father, James Benjamin Franklin Straw, was still serving in the Navy crisscrossing the Pacific Ocean to deal with the aftermath of WWII, his mother was safely in the hands of her husband's parents, who lived on Smith St. in York City. Bob's mother was pampered by her mother-in-law during the final months of her first pregnancy.

As for every young first-time mother, the tension kept rising during her last month and around Christmas of 1946 the anxiety still worsened due the harsh winter weather. She wondered how she could possibly get to the hospital considering the inclement conditions. With temperatures plummeting to 1° F during the cold-snap as her due-date approached, she decided that the twinges she felt were no more than additional kicks from her rather active little one ready to face the world.

So it happened that she started what would become her son's natural ability to not just be noticed, but remembered by anyone who would ever meet him. Clearly the taxi driver, negotiating his Checker Cab to York Hospital in the early hours of January 25th when the temperatures were mercifully climbing up to 62° F – muttered under his breath: "York is buzzing with Checker Cabs but it had to fall upon me to watch this poor lady languishing on my back seat, while I'm racing to the maternity ward."

But this baby had other ideas and, remembering 75 years later with one of his mischievous smiles, he chuckles "I was ready to face the world." Therefore, the cab driver, who began this trip with one female passenger, arrived at York Hospital with two, the other being an eager little infant wiggling on the back seat as the nurses rushed to his mother's aid. Needless to say, none of those involved in Bob's spectacular arrival would ever forget him. Enough reason for his mother to declare her first pregnancy was also her last: "He was the last Straw!"

Thus began the life of Robert Lee Straw, who considers himself lucky. "With oodles of great historic names in my family, I am lucky I got off lightly. I only have the blood-stained name of Robert Edward Lee (1807-1870), the famous Confederate General to carry around for life. Most other Straws are far more embellished, like one of my uncles, Thomas Jefferson Straw", Bob chuckles.

As it happened, Bob was born just 2 days before another famous name hit the headlines around the world: 'A Great Man Passes', announcing the death of Rotary's Founder Paul Harris on January 27th, 1947.

Once Bob's dad returned from his Navy assignment, he became a devoted hands-on father to his little boy, showing him all those tricks mothers always hope they

wouldn't learn. While her husband was working as an electroplater at the *Naval Ordinance Plant* in York, Bob's mum, Ada, was spoiling everyone who came to the cafeteria there, with her customary kindness as much with the food she served.

Eventually this Government plant, which produced bombs, was sold to *American Machine and Foundry*, which soon after split off, becoming AMF – the well-known producer of recreational equipment, while the plant itself went onto phenomenal success as Harley-Davidson, to this day brightening the face of every young (and also those not quite so young) man's face. The first real Harley-Davidson rolled out of the production hall on February 2nd. 1970. Since then the most famous motorbikes were made in York, such as the Iron 883, Forty-Eight, and Fat Boy. But by that time James Benjamin Franklin Straw and his wife had long moved on. Bob remembers those days: "Dad then went to work for Miles Shoe Co., and we traveled to different cities with his job and promotions.

I grew up in York, before we moved to Easton, then to Meadville where I graduated from Meadville Senior High in 1964 and then back to York to attend York Junior College.

Here we were, back - living with my grandmother again. I met my wife, who was a Junior at York High School, at Boys Club Pool."

Bob Straw never took the easy road but he walked every mile with his head held high, aiming for a better life for his loved ones – and often many others along the way. "While attending York College I went to work for Weis Markets on Edgar St. working 11 pm to 7 am during the night stocking shelves.

Bob became an eager student attending York Junior College. Or maybe, at second thought, his eagerness to rush off to college every morning with a smile on his face, whistling a happy tune, was not just because he was crazy about calculus or memorizing the location of the Victoria Falls, the height of Mt Shasta, or why exactly Hitler started WW II. It may not even have been that he was desperate to learn how to conjugate French verbs, although it would certainly have come in handy to get that oh so melodious confession "je t'aime" and even more enticing "je t'adore" into the ear of one pretty teenager by the name of Debora Zimmermann, who attended the same school. "Oh, she was a real looker, she was!" Bob reminisces, and immediately adds: "For me she still is!" How often do we have the privilege of witnessing true love that began in high school almost six decades ago?



January 8th 1966 – Mrs. & Mrs. Bob Straw

It took 2 years of intense courtship before these young love birds became

Mr. & Mrs. Robert L. Straw

when, on January 8th, 1966, Bob married his high school sweetheart, Debbie. Yet a little later when one of his friends asked him what he thinks about married life, Bob, known by all for his tongue in cheek, responded: “It stinks!”

Unfortunately, he really meant it, because the newlyweds were living in a 2nd floor apartment on Jackson Street, right above a taxidermist, who had more carcasses and untreated furs than anyone had ever seen – or smelled. After college I went to work for York Corporation and stayed there through 3 name changes in 11 years. Then I went to work as a salesman for a company out of Springfield, MA for 2 years. spending 2 weeks on the road and came home only every other weekend.”

He admits that this was not a good situation with 2 children growing up and with Debbie being left to run the daily show alone. It was inevitable that this job could not last.

“Thereafter I was unemployed for a year and a half; this was tough on the family – for every one of us, but thanks to the Salvation Army and our Church for helping us.” Hence Bob’s everlasting loyalty to the Salvation Army, which shines through every time they are asking for assistance. Bob knows only too well that they need all the help they can get – in order to help those who have nowhere else to turn.

“Finally, he was offered a job as Supervisor of the Glass Department at Graham Architectural where they built modern windows for old buildings.”

As for their first home on Jackson Street, there was only one way to preserve marital bliss, which was ‘out’. This move saw the young couple move to Ogontz Street. But they soon needed a bigger home, not only for their growing family but to accommodate their hobby - raising Rottweilers who are known to be America’s favorite breed. Despite weighing easily 100 lbs on the paw, they are gentle and cuddly, but at the drop of the hat they can turn into perfect ‘killing machine’ when it comes to protecting their families. As soon as they smell bad people, your Rottweiler friend becomes a dog with a mission. For this reason, they have become such a highly praised breed for the police, where they make up most of the K9 force. To their delight Debbie and Bob found that

Rottweilers are a joy to train. They are eager to learn new tricks, quick to remember what they have been taught, fun to play with for grown-ups and kids alike, and safe to anyone they count as a member of their family pack. Debbie and Bob were so successful that no less than 7 times during their 35 years of breeding Rottweiler they won a trophy for BEST DOG – below at

Westminster



When it comes to dog-tales (pun intended with many of them having their tails docked) Bob and his Fellow Rotarian Elizabeth Wolf could share their Rottweiler stories while forgetting the world around them. Safe in the knowledge that they have a fiercely protective friend by their side, they can walk and even live in the most remote areas without fear.

They had 2 children Robin Lynn and Daniel Gregory who both eventually went to Central High School.

Finally, in Oct. 1984, he followed his real ‘calling’ and became the Emergency Management Director for York County, where he spent 17 Years in that position, gaining knowledge and experience that is second to none. And being officially certified by the State he was now the County’s EMA Director, who would later become Federally Certified by FEMA.

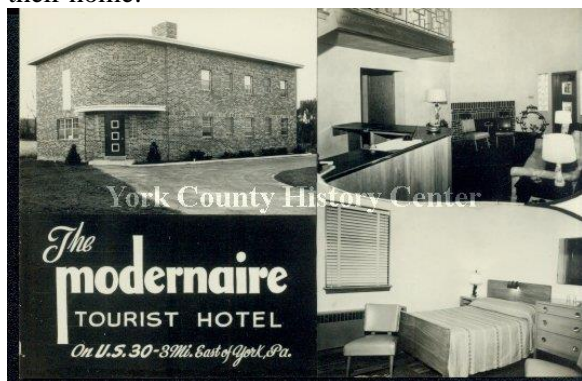
Wearing every hat available in this ‘business’ of dealing with any kind of emergency, Bob Straw was asked to be an Adjunct Instructor at the National Emergency Training Center in Emmittsburg, MD., and the PA State Fire Academy in Lewistown, PA

“I left York County in 2000 and went to work for the York County Chapter of the American Red Cross as their full-time Emergency Response Manager.

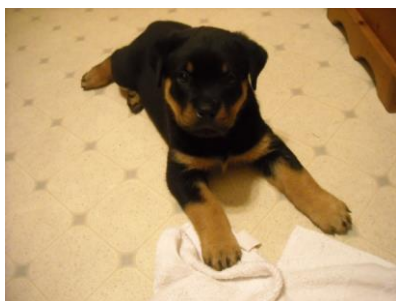
While at the Red Cross there were reorganizations and mergers so that I ended up becoming the Regional Emergency Response Manager for South Central PA. From living in Penn Oaks Development with their two children Robin Lynn and Daniel Gregory, a stroke of luck – for them as much as for all their future guests – opened up a new chapter in this young family’s life, when Deb’s parents decided to retire in 1985, selling to them their well-known Motel on Lincoln Highway.

And what better place to raise your children as well as breed your dogs than a motel, which opened up yet another career move for Bob, who had started wearing different hats along the way, thanks to being multi-talented and a fast learner, interested in absolutely everything. But most of all he is a real People-Person, if ever you meet one. Just at the time when even their new

home was bursting at the seams, Debbie's parents, Richard & Vera Zimmerman, having bought the Motel at the time of their daughter's wedding, were ready to retire and hand over their hotel to the next generation and as soon as the Bob and Debbie moved in, they made the hotel their home.



Travelers, lucky enough to walk through the doors of this iconic rounded corner building at the corner of East Market Street and Mt. Zion Road, *The Modernaire Motel*, found themselves in the middle of a boisterous family life, filled with laughter and enthusiasm. The latter shown even by the most unlikely canine everyone seems to fear, the family's Rottweilers, providing they approved of the new arrivals.

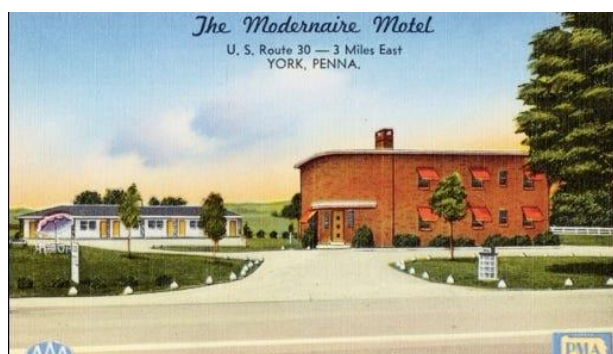


One of Bob's favorite Puppies at 6 weeks, who ended up being American & Canadian Champion White Roses. His name: 'Klingerman' because he was so cuddly, always clinging to those he loved

The hotel lounge became the living room for everyone, and the new owners' legendary hospitality meant that all were welcome. They both thrived on meeting new guests and spoiling them. More often than not, guests stayed longer than originally planned and were already booking a return visit before they left what they felt had become their home away from home, known as 'a Classic on The Lincoln Highway'. Prior to 1996, when the author Brian Butko visited the *The Modernaire Motel* while researching for his *Pennsylvania Traveler's Guide - The Lincoln Highway* Debbie confessed to him that Bob and she would really like to expand their Motel – as if they didn't have their hands full already. With 21 rooms that were almost always occupied, they had their work cut out.

Family members continued to drop in at all times. While everyone contributed to this special homely atmosphere, created by the Straw family, Debbie's brother Richard was the indispensable 'one-man-backup-team' who would 'man the desk' whenever the couple had to travel out of town. But being Bob and Debbie, they did much more than run a historic motel, which had opened its doors in 1949. During their 17 years of ownership, they were committed to preserving its legacy. It is largely thanks to them that the Motel even survived. Their contribution was recognized by the Board of Supervisors of Springettsbury Township on May 12th of 1994, when 'A Proclamation was given to Bob & Debbie Straw for their faithful preservation of the *Modernaire Motel*'.

Here an early postcard advertising the new motel



With the extension of 6 more rooms



And TODAY from across busy East Market Street

But there is one thing he does best: Help others! Although he never makes a big deal of all the things he does for the good of others, it is well known that if you need help, *any help*, ask Bob – and consider it done.

And having Bob around means you are in the presence of a 'walking encyclopedia'. No matter what the question may be, he has the answer. Maybe because he has worn more hats during his career than most or he simply draws information like a magnet – or both. Just ask Bob!

My husband, then the Director of Clinical Chemistry at York Hospital, still remembers meeting Bob for the first time, soon after President Carter had signed an Executive Order way back on April 1, 1979 – three days after the

partial meltdown of the Three Mile Island's nuclear power plant.

With FEMA – the *Federal Emergency Management Agency* - its dual mission of emergency management and civil defense, was established as part of the U.S Department of Homeland Security. And one of its first responders was Robert L. Straw, eager to learn as much as possible about York Hospital to assess any possible dangers – especially wherever they may lurk – in order to ensure his County EMA team members were prepared for any eventuality. Everything from structural weaknesses to fire hazards, from the storage of dangerous chemicals to emergency evacuation plans, it was part of his brief to draw on his knowledge in case of need.

With Bob Straw, York County had chosen someone who would become one of their most experienced and dedicated officers, who would, thanks to his many other involvements in emergencies, be the one person everyone could call, knowing that the correct plan of action would be implemented.



Here is Bob speaking to the current EMA Team -, after his career spanning well over half a century, which includes the Red Cross in York as well as the Emergency Response Service, it is impossible to imagine just how many lives have been saved thanks to Bob.



Having joined the York Fire department as a barely 17-year-old volunteer in 1964, to this very day, some 58 years later, Bob is still a Manchester Township firefighting volunteer. Yet the stories we won't hear from him are those where he risked his own life in order to save others. Even though his career as a firefighter should have come to a grinding halt almost at the very beginning when, during one of his first deployments, he was searching for victims trapped in a second-floor bedroom in a blazing

family home in the middle of the city. Engulfed by flames, Bob suddenly felt the floor collapse under his feet. He just managed to grab a hose-line, and with him dangling only inches from disaster, he watched what felt like 'slow motion', his hands being burned. Escaping with severe burns to his neck and wrists should have marked the end of his career.

But not so for Bob: "I can't even remember the pain from those burns because there is something in my blood that forces me to be out there. I just like helping people."

No wonder because he is genetically predestined starting with his great-grandfather, who volunteered for the Royal Fire Company in York when fire units were driven by horses. And Bob has passed on the genes to his son, who served as a firefighter on the U.S.S. John F. Kennedy in the 1990s.



Daniel G. Straw

Retired Senior Chief – US Navy

Bob can be proud of the long line of family members who dedicated their service to save lives and property whenever a fire threatens to consume everything the victims hold dear.

"My fire service began on August of 1965 when I joined the Union Fire Co. #3 of York City. My family had a tie to this Fire Co., my great-grandfather was a member, my grandfather was a member, my father was a member, so I became a member. I am now a life-member, and my son was also a member till he joined the Navy.

I was also a member of Reliance Fire Co. in West York, Victory Fire Co in Spring Garden Twp., Springetts Fire Co. in Springettsbury Twp. and currently Alert Fire Co in Manchester Twp. That is 57 years of service, and I am still active as a volunteer firefighter.

I also was in the first York County Emergency Medical Technician class and was active as an EMT for 35 years. I volunteered for Springetts Ambulance and worked part-time for Medic 102 out of Memorial Hospital and for Ambulance Services of York County, I became Rescue Captain at Springetts and helped rescue people from all kinds of entrapments. I am proud to say that I have helped with 3 field births during my EMT services."

Although his own memory of being born in a Checker Cab all those years ago may be somewhat sketchy, Bob was certainly supremely qualified in helping any baby, eager –

just like he once was – to defy the rules and enter the world by ‘doing it his way’ – ahead of time and without any of the medical backup. When asked if these babies are, by any chance, named after him, he just chuckles. But that’s Bob for you, - humble and always ready to help again, wherever he can.



With such a distinguished family history entwined with the History of Firefighting, Debbie Straw realized early on that her basement would never see shelves of bottled fruits, canned vegetables, potatoes heaped up in slatted wooden boxes, not to mention spaces for garden furniture tucked away throughout the winter months.



But true to her nature – and the spirit that made Bob fall in love with her – she takes it all in her stride, watching his private museum grow into a treasure trove that would make any young boy jump with joy. From any kind of model fire truck to old



Instead Debbie’s basement is every firefighter’s Dream Come True: A real Museum – the envy of those eager to learn how fires were extinguished before there were hydrants by the roadsides and when water hoses were mounted on carts, drawn by horses, - horses that had to be trained not to shy away but rather race straight towards a house ablaze with flames, collapsing while they approach it.

Yet wherever Bob is involved it means serious business with lots of laughter thrown in and he fondly remembers the all-important camaraderie of these unusual events: “Therefore, it was not surprising for Springetts residents to, one day, find their highly respected firefighters dressed in *diapers*. Naturally it was all for a good cause because they knew better than most people that there was a desperate shortage of hospital beds dedicated to the treatment of patients with severe burns.

I was a member of the ‘Springetts Fire Babies’ and we dressed in incontinent diapers and fire boots with baby bonnets.

We marched in fire parades in PA, NJ, NY, VA, DE, and MD. We collected money for the local burn units. Last I saw we had collected over \$15,000.00 for this cause.”



*Famous Springetts ‘Fire Babies’
Firefighters in Diapers*

This ‘Fund-Raiser’ – doubling up as ‘Fun-Raiser’ – turned into a spectacularly successful idea. At first these Fire Babies donated the money they raised to existing Burns Units as hospitals in neighboring counties. But it soon emerged that York Hospital was the perfect place and as soon as the Fire Babies had collected enough cash for the much-needed three-bed burns unit, Bob’s father (left) handed over the check to Dr. Robert Davis, to this very day known to all as ‘Bob Davis’, in the early 1980s.



With countless stories to share, Bob and his fellow retired firefighters got together regularly – just to enjoy the camaraderie - and a good laugh. Yet a breakfast meeting

in 2013 suddenly changed all that after a chief chuckled: "You are just a bunch of old farts."

Upon which a retired chief from the city laughed and shot back, "No, we are a bunch of Old Fire Farts."

Thanks to that playful remark and its witty response, the OLD FIRE FARTS were born and, on January 1, 2015, incorporated by the Pennsylvania Department of State as a non-profit charitable corporation, recognized by the Internal Revenue Service as a 501 (c) (3) organization. Needless to say, one of the OLD FIRE FARTS' Founder Members is Robert L. Straw, who has since served as their Secretary, President and Treasurer.

He also belongs to the "Firefighters Association of York County PA" and has served as their President, Treasurer and Board Member.

At Alert Fire Co., he serves as co-chair of the Ways and Means Committee and is the Fireman's Relief Association Secretary.

Bob's former high school sweetheart, Debbie, has long got used to being married to a husband who thinks, lives, acts, and still dreams 'outside the box', where your average 9-5 breadwinner would be found. She has every reason to be proud of his achievements and his vision. His words often ring in her ears: "It's a hobby, a part of our life, and a part of our history. If it's gone, the children of today would never know how fires were tackled before there were trucks with piercingly loud sirens racing through the streets. You have to start out small and show the progression of fire history to instill a passion in the next generation."

And instilling a passion is Bob's second nature – mostly even without knowing it. He leads by example, being the kind of role model throughout all walks of life every youngster is looking for.

Therefore it is not surprising that Bob is also involved in the activities of the *York County Fire Museum*, located in a 1903 firehouse where vintage engines & other firefighting-related artifacts are displayed at 757 West Market Street in York. Thanks to *The Royal Fire Company*, on January 3, 1902, the new engine house was occupied to house two horses, a combination chemical and hose wagon, and one man.

Apart from Bob's own private museum in his basement, where he keeps his priceless collection of memorabilia, this official fire museum is a fascinating place to visit not only for kids with displays of real-life firefighting equipment as used over the past 121 years. Some of our most unusual 'off-site' meetings have left lasting impressions on those lucky enough to attend in the summer of 2015.

It takes someone of Bob's caliber to rise through the ranks, becoming a respected authority on disaster management, - natural as well as man-made. Bob Straw will automatically be called – whether the emergency

services are dealing with floods, fires, earthquakes, tornadoes, accidents, hurricanes, even terrorist attacks. Unfortunately, the latter stands out in his memory as one of the worst experiences of all when, on the morning of September 11 2001, Bob was heading a team to analyze the circumstances which led to the injuries sustained during a Roller-Coaster ride at the York Fair the night before by a 7-year old boy, who had died in York Hospital during the night. Already deeply affected by the loss of such a young child's life, Bob could not have imagined that this day would turn into one everybody's worst nightmare.

Unfortunately, we are all too aware of the tragic events of that day and while TV screens around the world shocked their viewers with images beyond anyone's imagination, Bob was already New York's 'man on the ground' in York because of his training with the Red Cross Aviation Incident Response Team. He was selecting a team of first responders and mental healthcare workers to dispatch to NYC, collating the paperwork and arranging special Emergency car passes for everyone who was assigned to travel to NY city - a city under siege, with all bridges closed and the airspace under complete lock-down. The experiences which those teams reported back to Bob are haunting him to this day, with images of them taking relatives, bereaved and in shock, to the sites where the trucks dumped the loads removed from the site of the collapsed twin towers.

On the very day of the attack, operating more phones than he could handle at the same time, he was suddenly asked to also send a team from the local Red Cross Chapter to the plane crash site in Shanksville. After the selected volunteers had been told to prepare for a 2-week assignment in Arlington following the attack on the Pentagon, they found themselves visiting relatives of crash victims to help them in dealing with their unimaginable loss. They even played a pivotal role in organizing two memorial services on September 17th and 20th, helping to ensure the dignity and respect for all those involved. The deep scars those volunteers will carry for the rest of their lives becomes visible when, every year September 11th, they gather once again at the site for the annual ceremony, facing their own painful memories as much as those of everyone around them.

Thanks to his unique training and his vast experience in disaster management, spanning almost six decades, Bob's standing in this community – and way beyond – is second to none. Therefore, it is not surprising that he still – and probably always will be – the person everyone asks for help, never mind that he retired on his 66th birthday, January 25, 2013.



And still, for Debbie and Bob their family has always been at the center of their universe.



Their daughter Robin with her 'little' brother Daniel, 2 years her junior

FAMILY FACTS – in a nutshell:

Their first-born daughter, Robin, went to Grove City College and Daniel, who was born 2 years later, went into the US Navy for 20 years.

Robin came out of college and went to work for York National Bank and is still in Banking today at Fulton Bank.

Robin got married to David Richwine from Dillsburg, but despite their divorce, their two daughters, Lily and Anna, are thriving. They are the pride and joy of Debbie and Bob.

Lily has graduated in Biology and works at the Westshore Wildlife Animals Rescue.



The proud grandparents celebrating Lily's graduation from Pittsburg University in 2022 – see Bob's Happy \$\$\$ June 2022

Anna is a Sophomore at Penn State main campus and is studying in Elementary Education and Child Psychology. Besides that, Lily is the family's star 'in the air'



Amazing Anna effortlessly taking to the air
And although her granddad is trying to hide his pride, he laughs when he refers to her as



'Headless Anna'

Daniel retired from the US Navy as a Senior Chief and went to work as Safety Manager for a national company that provides security for Government Facilities & Nuclear Facilities. He is still employed by them. Daniel is married to Marrie, and they have 2 children, Milton and Sarah.

Milton is Married to Laura, who has her Doctorate in Pharmacy and works at the Hospital in Columbia, SC. Milton is studying for his Doctoral Degree at the University of South Carolina. He is also working for the University as an adjunct Professor.

Sarah is an Assistant Manager for a large hotel in Columbia, SC. She will be getting married on Dec. 3rd of this year to her sweetheart of several years and we as Bob's fellow Rotarians were privileged to follow their love story thanks to several Happy Dollar donations by her proud granddad.

As we already know, Sarah's groom is 6' 1" tall Nick Ciuffo, the famous American professional baseball catcher

in the Chicago White Sox organization. He has played in Major League Baseball for no lesser than the Tampa Bay Rays and the Baltimore Orioles. Needless to say – the whole family is thrilled about Sarah & Nick’s love story and everyone is ticking off on his/her own count-down list of things to do before the Big Day when the wedding bells ring for the bride and groom where Sarah Straw will become

*Mrs. Nicholas A. Ciuffo
at the romantic French Huguenot Church
on 136 Church Street
in Charleston, SC, 29401*

Seeing his beautiful granddaughter Anna suspended so elegantly in mid-air and watching his future grandson-in-law display world-class talent on the field always brings out the best in Bob as his indomitable spirit, which we all admire, makes him

*- A Man with a Mission –
- A Man who is Larger than Life –*



Throwing the ball at Nick, his soon to be grandson-in-law

Bob’s Dedication to Rotary

With Bob’s legacy of being born at the time when Paul Harris died, he was predestined to become a Rotarian, especially as *Service above Self* is in the very make-up of Bob’s character. He simply cannot live without helping anyone who needs help, no matter who they are. Yet when the late Jack Krug and John Schmitt, two of our club’s founder members, invited Bob to join their club, it was not Bob’s first attempt to offer his many talents to the Rotary movement. Having already been invited by a Rotarian from another club to attend a meeting– whose name we won’t mention here since this would not be ‘fair to all concerned’, Bob didn’t find that club to be very friendly quite at home because after he had accompanied his prospective proposer to his table, Needless to say, Bob has never again visited that particular Rotary Club again, especially as he is

considered by all who know him as one of the masters of extending a warm welcome. Hopefully those Rotarians won’t know what they have lost because on January 5th, 1989, Robert Lee Straw was welcomed with open arms into the Rotary Club of York East. Since Bob would never let any grass grow under his feet, it took just 16 months before he took over as Club Secretary. And in July of 1993 he began to serve as President of our club. Since then, Bob has been on every committee, taken on any responsibility, and – in his customary style – solved any problem that was put before him. Quietly and without even asking what a job may involve, his answer will always be: “Yes, of course. What do you want me to do?”



Bob at one of Ada & Cathy Bene’s traditional Christmas Parties, looking (and even more feeling) like Sir Winston Churchill

Like so many others, I can vouch for Bob’s ability to offer the warmest welcome to anyone because on the day I was to be inducted we were meeting at Leg-Up Farm, a place that was bone chilling even during those beautifully sunny morning hours in May 2015, while I was totally underdressed for this chilly occasion. Without even asking, after a quick glance at me shivering in my short sleeves, he took off his jacket and wrapped it around me. Warm welcomes don’t get any more heartfelt than that and I can still feel the comfort that radiated from Bob’s jacket. – Thank you, Bob, for creating this precious memory of my induction at my new home club, especially after my arrival in York from my oh so sunny tropical paradise where I had just resigned from my Rotary Club and leave my of 33 years in Nairobi.

Photos: curtesy of Bob Straw

For further information:

<https://www.oldfirearts.org/index.html>

Fire Museum of York County:

<https://www.yorkcity.org/city-services/departments/fire-department/fire-department-history/royal-fire-company/>

Or take a quick 23-minute tour from the comfort of your home on YouTube:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OTb3kmOn-x4>