

CLOSE UP: BERNARD MCNAMARA

Interview by Cindy Butler Focke

Bernard McNamara enlisted in the Marine Corps during World War II at age 19.

"They decided I was too much of a runt and put me in administration," he said. The then 5 foot 11 inch, 128- pound Boston native, who intended one day to become a certified public accountant, decided he didn't like the monotony of office work. So after the war he switched gears.

The 90-year-old known as Mac was recently recognized by the Opticians Association of Virginia for 60 years outstanding service as a licensed optician. And he's still on the job.

"I have the oldest active optician's license in the state of Virginia," he said. More than 5000 licenses have been awarded in numerical order within the state since the first one in 1954. McNamara's framed certificate notes number 108. The proclaimed "Yankee by birth; Virginian by choice" married Theresa, his wife of 65 years, in 1949 – the same year he graduated from the Fenway School of Mechanical Optics.

At the time there were no jobs for opticians in Boston, he said, so the couple relocated to Richmond with a plan to head back north in about five years. Instead they went south for a job with Traylor Optical in Norfolk, and then moved to Virginia Beach to open the company's fifth location.

He ventured into business with E. Ray Howell in the 1960s, the optical company Howell and McNamara was born. Following Howell's death, McNamara became the company sole owner, and by age 67 decided it was time to slow down.

He sold the business to Bruce Jones of Studio Optix, and grandfathered himself part-time employment at the business now located on 30th Street at the Oceanfront.

Why does McNamara continue to



Mac McNamara—Photo Credit: Cindy Butler Focke

work? It's about helping people, he said. "Sometimes it's very heart-warming when you put their glasses on and they say – 'Wow!'"

His key to longevity is to "keep active and mingle with people," something his physician suggested years ago.

"I'm working on doctor's orders," he said with a smile.

What do you enjoy most about what you do? Helping people see.

What do you like most about the people you work/volunteer with? We are all striving for the same thing: trying to help others.

Who or what inspires you to do what you do? My wife, Theresa.

Who or what in your background best prepared you for what you do? Served in the Marine Corps during World War II.

If a snapshot was taken of you enjoying a perfect day, what would it look like? Lunch with Theresa on my day off.

Pet peeve: Egotistical people

Best job: Optician

Worst job: Marine Corps clerk

First car: 1937 Plymouth coupe

Favorite Virginia Beach spot: Home

Comfort food: Anything chocolate, or a good steak

Favorite TV show from the past: "I Love Lucy"

A recently read book you'd recommend: "Killing Patton", by Bill O'Reilly

Of what achievements are you most proud? Living to be 90

If you could choose your theme song, what would it be? "You are my Sunshine"

What is your personal motto? "Live and let live."

The words of wisdom you share with someone interested in doing what you do: Patience

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