

Neighbors

Fire company honors decades of service

Busy volunteer inspires friends and neighbors

By CAROL CHILD
Special to The News Journal

Imagine a lazy summer afternoon. The kind where bees buzz among the sunflowers and birds chirp among the mighty oaks. A small fighter plane drones across the sky, its propeller fanning the air beneath its wings. The men are gone away fighting. The time is World War II.

Out of the blue a brush fire flares. Anna Mae Hedrick jumps behind the wheel of the Mill Creek Fire Company truck and engages the gears, lurching the truck into action. At the scene, Hedrick leaps off the truck, grabs a broom and beats out the flames.

Hedrick, 87 this year, did not stop volunteering when the flames were out. Through the years she has continued to volunteer extensively, often riding the helm (of the PTA, for example, while her six children attended school).

In March 2002, the Mill Creek Fire Company recognized Hedrick as the member with the longest service — 63 years. She still serves as an active member of the Ladies Auxiliary, where she started as a Powder Puff Girl, driving fire trucks and ambulances.

"Recently," says Hedrick, "I went to a yard sale in Marshallton. A woman said to me, 'You don't remember me, do you? You used to take me to the hospital with nosebleeds during the war.' A lifelong Marshallton resident, Hedrick proclaims, "I love Marshallton. I've lived here all my life. The house I was born in is still in Marshallton, my grandmother's house. Every birthday I get my picture taken in front of the house."

Her husband, William George Hedrick Sr., died in 1961, leaving her to raise their two youngest children. Devastated, she said, "I can't do it. I can't. I can't."

"But I did," she says now. Her youngest, James R. Hedrick, is a major with the New Castle County Police.



The News Journal/FRED COMEGYS

Friends call Marshallton resident Anna Mae Hedrick a Renaissance woman and the "Energizer Bunny."

Hedrick starts her days breakfasting at the local coffee shop. "I love going there in the mornings. I read The News Journal there. We all know each other," she says.

Friends call her the Energizer Bunny. Always on the go, Hedrick loves kite flying and roller coaster riding. "I just love the thrill of going down and back up real fast. We have so much fun. I'm afraid of it, in a way. They don't put things together right these days. They use weak parts. People just don't care anymore."

"I've known Anna Mae all my life," says Catherine Jenkins, chaplain, member of the board of directors and past president of the Mill Creek Fire Company Ladies Auxiliary. She's a great lady. Everybody likes her. She doesn't go to fires anymore.

"That engine had an awful lot of gears," recalls Hedrick.

Says Patricia Barry, clinical supervisor of the Nemours Health Clinic Eye Department in Rockland, where Hedrick is a patient, "We call her a Renaissance woman. She has a wealth of information. I just love to sit and listen to her. Also, she's a great mentor. She listened to me

when my son was killed. She listened to me and encouraged me ... to get my degree."

Barry, actively involved in productions at the Everett Theatre in Middletown, said "Anna Mae has given us [old] clothes which we have used in productions. Every time she gives me anything, we add it to our costume closet. One girl borrowed to wear to her prom a black taffeta dress Anna Mae had given us.

"She always has a joke, a smile. She's never down. I just think the world of her. She has done so much for each and every one of us."

"I love dancing the most," says Hedrick. "In March 2002 the Mill Creek Fire Company celebrated its 75th anniversary. We had given a fire truck to the New York City Fire Department in Queens to replace one they lost on 9/11. Firemen and firemen's widows came down to help us celebrate. One fireman, Rich Smith, asked me to dance. They cleared the floor for us. We danced until two-thirty Sunday morning. When I left and got in the car, he came running across the parking lot to me. 'I can't let you go without saying good-

night,' he said, and he gave me a kiss.

"See, even when you have white hair, miracles do happen."

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PROFILE

Anna Mae Hedrick

Age: 87

Family: Six children, Margaret, of Marshallton; Edith, of Magnolia; Jacqueline, of Elmhurst; William Jr., of Oceanview; Mary, of Newark; and James, of Wilmington; 17 grandchildren, 25 great-grandchildren, 5 great-great-grandchildren. Husband, William George Hedrick Sr., died in 1961 at age 51.

Residence: Marshallton – lifelong resident

Hobbies/Interests: Social dancing; Marshallton-area history; sewing crafts, roller coaster riding, kite flying. Member of Friends of Brandywine Springs.

Honors/Citations: Mill Creek Fire Company member with the longest service – 63 years in 2002; Marshallton PTA Appreciation Award for service as ways and means chairwoman, hospitality chairwoman and more; Henlopen State Park Kite Flying Medal for oldest person flying a kite and a medal for the best store-bought kite.



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