

# *The Normandy Times*

*February 2020* Editor-in-Chief/Layout Design, Lori Lancaster



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# RESIDENT OF THE MONTH

## *Gertrude Pfaff*



Life can be hard and throw us some very difficult challenges. Over the years, Gertie often said, “Sometimes you have to laugh or you’ll cry.” Gertie was no stranger to adversity, yet she always managed to find the good in every experience.

She started out with a seemingly idyllic life on her maternal grandparents’ vineyard in Bajmok, a village located in current-day Serbia, which was then populated by Germans. She fondly remembered her early life on the vineyard. Her grandfather would lift her up to the trellis to sample the grapes and whisper conspiratorially not to tell her grandmother. Since her family lived at the top of a steep hill, she and her brother Franz had an important job. When her father returned from delivering the wine, he whistled at the bottom of the drive

before running the horse-drawn wagon up the hill. At the top, Gertie and Franz would hear the whistle and quickly open the gate so their father did not have to stop on the hill.

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For reasons never properly explained, her family boarded a train and ended up in a labor camp to ‘re-program’ ethnic Germans. It was basically slave labor; they cleaned machine parts until their fingers ached. Maria, always an excellent cook, worked in the kitchens and stole a knife which she secretly passed along to Franz (who was 2 years older than Gertie). She advised him to use the knife daily on the fence halfway between two guards where he would not be seen. After the link was finally cut, the little family snuck out at night. Maria untwisted the fence to create an opening, and the three of them slid under the fence. They were eventually found hiding in a field by a kind and brave farmer who helped them make a perilous journey into Germany. Gertie and Franz were bound and gagged to prevent movement or screams, and they hid with their mother in a hay wagon. At the border crossing, guards searched the hay with pitch forks. Fortunately, the only injury was a small stab in Maria’s arm.

Once in Germany, Gertie’s family lived first in a refugee camp and later in a spare room of a home. The home owner, Jacob, resented Gertie’s family because he was forced to give up his room due to the post-war ‘quarterming’ policy. Despite the tragedies of war, Gertie remained a relatively happy child. She sat on the stairs singing, “Meister Jacob,

Meister Jacob” (the German version of Brother John). One day, she timed it such that real church bells rang during the part of the song describing the bells. The homeowner, Jacob, heard her music and was so enchanted that he gave this starving, singing child food and favored her for the remainder of her stay. For years, Gertie told her family this story without realizing this was a popular children’s song rather than one of her own creation. When her children revealed the truth, she found that very funny.

Despite Jacob’s generosity, young Gertie was starving. Therefore, she was sent to live in a convent in the Black Forest. With good humor, she often explained why the adult Gertie hated oatmeal. The children were fed a bowl of oatmeal for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Oatmeal at every meal! A candy bar was placed in front of them for motivation. If a child finished the entire bowl of oatmeal, the child could have the candy bar. After too many partial bowls to count, young Gertie finally finished an entire bowl of oatmeal and received her candy bar. However, her little tummy was so full, she did not have room for her candy bar. She went to sleep that night, tightly gripping her candy bar until it melted in her hand. Thankfully, the compassionate nuns gave her a new candy bar the next day.

After coming to America, Gertie’s life became much more stable. She lived on a farm with relatives and attended high school in Atwater, Ohio. After high school, she moved to Akron with her mother and worked on an assembly line making fishing reels. While attending a dance at the local German-American club, she met Philip and fell in love. They married and began a family. Once again, her life was seemingly idyllic.

Life is never free of challenges. When seven months pregnant, Gertie fell out of bed and went into labor. Philip ran down the street to enlist the help of his mother. Gertie envisioned them... an elderly woman in her night dress running down the street in the dark followed by a young man in his boxer shorts.



Laughing, Gertie reflected, “It’s was a wonder these two didn’t get picked up by the police.” Always putting responsibility first, Gertie delivered her baby. She cut the umbilical cord with scissors from her nearby knitting basket, wrapped him in a blanket and safely laid him down next to her. Only then she allowed herself to faint before Philip and his mother burst into the room. Sadly, her son did not live very long. A terrifying ordeal, yet she told the story with a smile as well as a tear. After the miscarriage, Gertie and Philip were blessed with two healthy children, Edward and Suzanne. Always having wanted three children, Gertie tried again. After three miscarriages in a row, Gertie had given up when she became pregnant with her youngest child Lisa. Gertie assumed she was “going through the change” at the young age of 36. After her doctor informed her that she was actually pregnant, she was nervous about telling Philip. When he came home from work, she was noticeably distressed and he asked, “What’s wrong, did you smash the car again?” Apparently, little mishaps with the car were not uncommon. Gertie and her sister-in-law, Theresia, were a team like Lucy and Ethel.

Once, when a fender was accidentally pulled off the car, they had the idea of gently driving the car back into a post to push the fender back onto the car. Theresia stood next to the post holding a blanket so the paint would not get scratched as Gertie drove into it. The mental picture of Theresia and Gertie's adventures always gave a good laugh. Amazingly, they were successful in keeping the fender bender incident from Philip.

Understandably, Philip was happy to hear the car was fine and even more delighted Gertie was pregnant. "I've still got it," he exclaimed. Gertie always said the unexpected, late baby was an accident but not a mistake.



Gertie, Philip, and their children lived a comfortable, happy life filled with camping, boating, and many trips to Canada until Philip was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis. Gertie cared for him as his health deteriorated; never growing impatient, or lamenting their misfortune. Philip died rather suddenly, leaving Gertie a widow at a relatively young age of 57. While surely grieving herself, she showed unwavering strength as her youngest child, then only 20, struggled to comprehend the loss.

The consummate caregiver, Gertie cared for her children, husband, grandchildren, a close friend with terminal bone cancer, and even her

parents who both lived until 91. In 2001, Gertie suffered a massive stroke which initially paralyzed the entire left side of her body. Being the patient after years of caregiving was not a natural experience for her. After three months of extensive therapy, Gertie regained most of her ability and was able to return home.

Gertie's second-best piece of advice, "If it doesn't kill you, it makes you stronger." She is definitely a strong woman, a strength needed throughout her life. While life sometimes gives many good reasons to cry, she usually follows her own advice and chooses to laugh and smile instead.



Earliest photo of Gertrude Pfaff.

## February's Special Days

Feb. 2<sup>nd</sup>

Groundhog Day,  
Super Bowl

Feb. 14<sup>th</sup>

Valentine's Day

Feb. 17<sup>th</sup>

Presidents' Day

Feb. 25<sup>th</sup>

Mardi Gras

Feb. 26<sup>th</sup>

Ash Wednesday



## Valentine's Day Party

February 14<sup>th</sup>

Main dining room 2:30 pm

With Dave Michael



## Mardi Gras Party

February 25<sup>th</sup>

Main dining room 2:30 pm

With Gary Ryan

Memory Care 2:30 pm

With Johnny

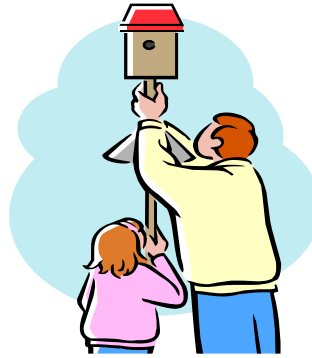


## ABSENTEE BALLOTS

Available at the Front Desk

March 17<sup>th</sup>

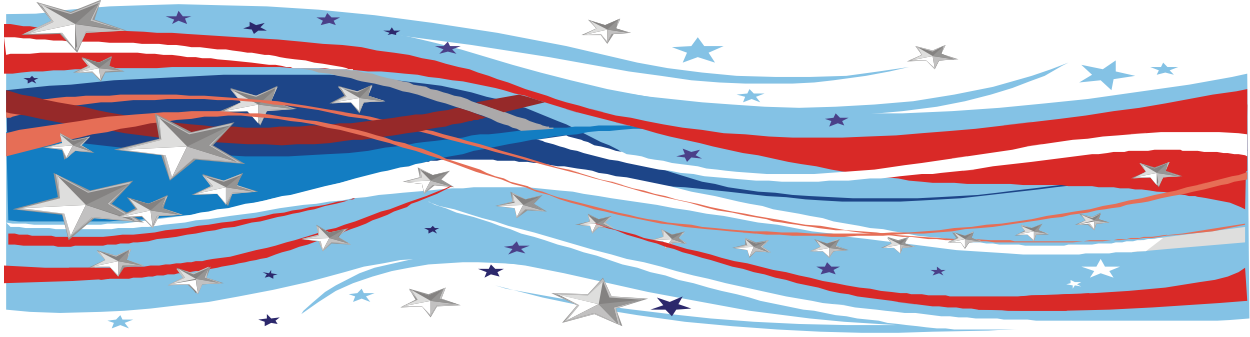
Primary Election



Many of the residents enjoy bird feeders outside their windows. Please be sure to store the seed in an air tight container, preferably in one of their (resident's) storage units. *Families or guardians are responsible for filling these feeders.*



During this cold and flu season, we ask that visitors who are ill please refrain from visiting. The residents are likely to contract these illnesses from others.



Dear Family Members and Guardians,

Please be advised of the **Primary Election on March 17, 2020**

**February 18th is the close of Voter Registration and DEADLINE to update change of address.**

The Board of Elections will be sending out the Absentee Ballots. **Your ballot must be received by the Board of Elections by 12:00 pm on the Saturday before election day. That Saturday falls on March 14<sup>th</sup>.** Any registered voter may vote an absentee ballot. Please note that families or guardians will be responsible for filling out absentee ballots and returning them into the Board of Elections for your loved one. Families and guardians will also be responsible for filling out ballots with their loved one and returning completed ballots to Cuyahoga County Board of Elections. The required application is available at the receptionist's desk.

If you have any questions regarding voter information, please phone me at 440-333-5400 or e-mail at [tammydanilovic@gmail.com](mailto:tammydanilovic@gmail.com).

Mail all absentee voting applications and registration cards to:

Attention: Meredith Turner, Coordinator  
Ballot Department  
Nursing Home Division  
Cuyahoga County Board of Elections  
2925 Euclid Ave.  
Cleveland, Ohio 44115-2497

If you have any questions for the Board of Elections contact Meredith Turner, Election Official, Candidate and Petition Services at Cuyahoga County Board of Election at phone 216.443.6471 X4434, e-mail at [mmtturner@cuyahogacounty.us](mailto:mmtturner@cuyahogacounty.us).

Sincerely,

Tammy Danilovic  
Activities Director

# Normandy Care Center Staff


Administrator	Julie Bauman
Admissions Director	Faith Griffin
Activities Director	Tammy Danilovic
Administrative Assistant	Cindy Ward
Controller	David Rodgers
Dietary Manager	Colleen Merella
Dietitian	Sandee Seib
Environmental Services And Maintenance	Curtis Cole
Rehab Services Director	Ellen Straub
Social Work	Ginny Moes



Send an e-mail message  
to any of our residents at:


[activities@normandyretirement.com](mailto:activities@normandyretirement.com)

We will deliver any messages  
**same day.**



*"Happy Birthday to You"*

**Residents' February Birthdays**



Virginia Baron	Feb. 3rd
John Skordelis	Feb. 4 <sup>th</sup>
Virginia Coticchia	Feb. 5 <sup>th</sup>
Helen Koteles	Feb. 12 <sup>th</sup>
Dana Weston	Feb. 20 <sup>th</sup>
Lottie Ford	Feb. 23 <sup>rd</sup>