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May is Older Americans' Month



St. Ann's Home resident William J. Britt, age 88, approaches aging and death with a lighthearted attitude.

Jeff Goulding/Courier-Journal

Senior Citizens Reflect on Aging Gracefully

By Teresa A. Parsons

His face seems to have a line for each of his 88 years. His eyes, sunken and made small by thick, wire-rimmed glasses, are filled with all that he's seen in years of travel. Yet, despite his age, William Britt radiates life.

Britt is one of hundreds of elderly people who seek security and companionship at homes like St. Ann's Home and the Heritage as they grow older. It's not an easy transition, but one that each person deals with in his own way.

Britt spent most of his 46-year working career as a manager with

Burroughs Corp., travelling and visiting countries all over the world. Now his world consists mostly of what's between the four walls of his room, but he faces these limitations straightforwardly and with humor.

"You know, they say you're only as young as you feel, but you can't relate the feelings you have now to the past. If I only knew where and when I was going to die, I wouldn't be there," he said, chuckling.

Many of the facility's residents find old age to be pretty much like other life situations — as good as they make them. John Davis, a former pharmacist from

Mount Morris is one of these, smiling in disbelief at his age of 91. "I feel about 50," he said.

Despite impaired hearing, which makes it difficult for him to keep up with conversations, Davis says with conviction "the last three years have been the best."

Keeping busy and being needed are important to Lois Sackett, 87, who credits her ability to accept the aging process in part to the piano she towed along with her when she came to the Heritage. Since then, she's been playing for any event, from before-meal intervals to musical productions. She

said that the appreciation of others keeps her going. "There's still a lot to enjoy," she added.

Most of her 31 years as a teacher were spent in Rochester's Public School #17, giving a generation of second-graders their first glimpses at the world of books, numbers and ideas.

The later years of her career were devoted to small remedial reading classes — working with the kids who got left behind and who, without special help, would never see a book as anything more than an instrument of punishment.

Sackett wouldn't trade places with the
Continued on Page 9