

SENIOR
FEATURE

Centenarian finds joy in each day

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — On St. Valentine's Day, one day before the 100th day of the school year, City School No. 23 invited Edward Mueller to talk to third-graders about his life. Mueller had turned 100 on Jan. 29, 1995.

The questions they asked about Mueller's childhood strongly indicated that the children had yet to develop a sense of time.

"One kid asked if they had slaves back then," Mueller said. "Another kid asked if they had dinosaurs."

While the latter question was laughable, the former query wasn't that far off. The United States permitted slavery until just 30 years before Mueller's birth in the last century.

A life-long parishioner of St. Michael's Church, 869 N. Clinton Ave., Mueller was born when one William — McKinley — was the nation's 25th president. He continues to thrive today under the presidency of another William — Clinton — the nation's 42nd chief executive.

He can still remember when Rochester's streets were traversed by horse-pulled streetcars; when an airplane was something novel to see in the sky; and when silent movies became "talkies."

Mueller credits his longevity to the Lord's good grace and a healthy diet.

"Well, as long as I remember, I've started the day with corn flakes and raisin bran and milk and a glass of orange juice, a cup of coffee and two prewed stunes," he said, stopping to laugh. "Two stewed prunes."

"And that's what keeps me moving," Mueller added.

Full of good humor and stories, Mueller acts like a man with several more decades to live.

"He's in better shape than I am," said his son, Richard, with whom Mueller lives in the St. Michael's neighborhood.

In addition to Richard, Mueller has another son and two daughters. Collectively, his children have given him six grandchildren, who in turn have given him 10 great-grandchildren.

And at least one of his great-grandchildren plans to marry soon, giving Mueller hope that he may see a great-great grandchild someday.

Mueller's own marriage to his wife, Julia, lasted 71 years, until her death in 1989 at the age of 93.

"The best high in my life was the day I got married," Mueller said, smiling about how his friends found the honeymoon house he and his bride had lined up.

"We crawled in bed that night, and there were beans in the bed," he laughed.

Married bliss was interrupted less than a year later when he was drafted into the U.S. Army after the nation entered World War I in 1917. Mueller served at Fort Dix, N.J., until he was discharged.

Since the war's end, Mueller has stayed pretty much in St. Michael's neighborhood. He strayed from the area for only one decade, moving to Irondequoit during the Great Depression after losing his meat-cutting business and



S. John Wilkin/Staff photographer

Ed Mueller, who celebrated his 100th birthday January 29, spoke to students at School 23 about his life and received a cake made by students.

home to hard times.

In the 1940s and the early 1950s, Mueller managed the meat department at Star Market on North Clinton Avenue. During this time, he served a term as president of the local AFL-CIO.

It was during his tenure as union president that Mueller performed what he considered his most important deed in life — he helped a downtown department store recruit and hire Rochester's first African-American woman to work behind a food counter serving white people.

Recalling this act made Mueller do something that contrasted sharply with the fun and laughs that had characterized most of his interview — he choked up.

"I gave her a nice talk," he remembered with tears in his eyes, pointing out that the woman feared racial taunts from customers. "I said 'I know it's going to be a tough world out there ... consider yourself a better person than they are!'"

From 1953-60, Mueller worked for another supermarket, Wegmans, before retiring and devoting himself to the parish he called his "second home" for the last 35 years.

With his assistant, Ray Agnes, Mueller took care of the parish's buildings, overseeing the physical condition of the church, the school, the convent and the rectory.

"I painted every room in every one of those buildings myself," he said. "I know every corner of that church."

And the parishioners apparently have not forgotten Mueller's service. On his birthday in January, he was cited at the 9 a.m. Mass, and feted with a reception afterward.

A booklet put together in his honor and distributed at the Jan. 29 celebration included a few words from Mueller that anyone wishing to live to his age

might ponder.

"Enjoy life while you can because life is too short," Mueller said. "I've lived 100 years and still life is so short. What you make of your life is yours to choose. God doesn't tell you what to do with it; you have your own free will ... May all joys and God's blessings and your memories sustain you."

Dancing events offered at two Rochester sites

ROCHESTER — The City of Rochester's Department of Parks, Recreation and Human Services is offering a variety of dancing events in the upcoming months.

The Stardust Ballroom Series, held at the Edgerton Community Center, 41 Backus St., will take place on the first and third Tuesday of each month through May, beginning at 7:30 p.m. each night.

In addition, dances will be held at the Danforth Center most Friday afternoons through June 30, from 1:45 to 3:45 p.m. each day.

For details on Danforth Center events, call 716/428-6746 from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. weekdays. For information on Edgerton Center events, call 716/428-6769 after 3 p.m. weekdays.

Senior euchre tourney slated for March 20

ROCHESTER — The Danforth Center and Monroe County Office for the Aging are co-sponsoring a euchre tournament on Monday, March 20. The tournament will run from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. at the Danforth Center, 200 West Ave.

Ten games of euchre are scheduled for each entrant. This is a singles tournament, so partners are not required.

Admission is free, but pre-registration is required. To register, call 716/274-7824.

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Nazareth College will offer courses for senior citizens

ROCHESTER — Nazareth College, 4245 East Ave., has scheduled a selection of courses geared to senior citizens.

The courses, which will begin in March or April, include: explorations of current issues and foreign policy decisions; studies of French, Spanish, German and Italian; examinations of the miracles of Jesus and Jerusalem at the time of Jesus; an overview of the effects of hearing loss on an individual and his or her family; investigations into art his-

tory; music in America, and American literary classics; discussion of great books; and ventures into creative writing and writing one's life story.

Cost for each course is \$40. There will be no grades or final examinations. Each course will meet once a week during the day, usually for six to eight weeks.

For more information about the courses, call Dolores Johnson, director of Nazareth's Center for Lifelong Learning, at 716/586/2525, ext. 404.