

FEATURE

A woman's housekeeping century

Plan the golden years

If people planned for retirement as well as they planned for the rest of their life, it could make their "golden" years just that, according to Mary Berk, director of volunteer services for LIFESPAN, a not-for-profit agency based in Monroe County that serves older adults and their caregivers.

Taking control of your retirement by consciously planning for those years can steer you away from the depression, hopelessness and regret that sometimes mark retirees' lives, she added.

"If people planned their retirement as they planned their education or careers, it might truly become the most exciting meaningful time in their lives."

Berk said if you're planning to retire, you should identify those things that are most meaningful to you.

"It may be work, full or part-time, consulting, starting a business, volunteer work, educational opportunities, travel, sports, more time with family, or a combination of several options," she said. "Knowing what matters to you will prevent you from wasting time and making poor choices that offer no personal satisfaction."

Berk is not the only expert to urge potential retirees to think about the future. For example, Mercy Center with the Aging in Brighton, a ministry of the Sisters of Mercy, holds seminars on such issues as financial planning for seniors. Among the questions the center suggests seniors ask themselves are the following:

What should I know about Medicare, Medicaid, HMOs, long-term-care insurance and other coverage?

Do I and other family members have updated wills?

What should I do about spelling out advance directives for medical treatment? What should I do about appointing a health proxy or agent to act on my behalf?

Many of these themes are echoed in a pamphlet called "Enjoying Retirement," whose production was cosponsored by the U.S. Administration on the Aging and the MetLife Consumer Education Center. The pamphlet can be found on the Internet at www.pueblo.gsa.gov/press/mfcpubs/retirmit.txt. The pamphlet offers numerous tips including the following:

- Take classes at the local community college for the joy of learning, or go to the library and develop a list of books you've always wanted to read.

- Hit the road! Indulge your wanderlust by traveling extensively.

- Get involved in politics by working on a campaign, running for office yourself or keeping tabs on legislation that affects you.

"Retirement is the opportunity to engage in meaningful activities and pursue one's dreams," Berk said. "It is freedom from organizational constraints and family responsibilities, and it is choice to select the path one will follow into the future."

LIFESPAN may be reached at 716/244-8400. Mercy Center with the Aging is at 716/244-5190.

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

PALMYRA — Elizabeth Kelly, a longtime professional housekeeper, sat in the kitchen of her employer's home and pondered the coming spring and what she would have to do when it came.

"I've got to snap into it and get my windows done as soon as it warms up," she said. "My windows have never been this dirty."

For the record, her windows were clear enough to allow her to see into the backyard where a bird she calls "my robin" sat on a fence.

Kelly is 99 years old, and keeps house for Father Francis Vogt.

A full-blooded Mohawk, she grew up on a reservation in northern New York, a middle child with eight siblings, all of whom have died. She was baptized a Catholic with the name of Elizabeth Cook and grew up being taught and influenced by the Sisters of Mercy who also had a farm on the reservation. There on the reservation, she said, she obtained a fifth-grade education, and was known for sneaking out of her house occasionally for various reasons her father did not understand.

"Sometimes I was sent to bed with a raw potato," she said, remembering how she was disciplined.

Her Mohawk name is pronounced "Gun Am Sa Awi" and means "Carrying a house," she said. Her parents named her that because she used to sit and watch her father carrying chicken coops on their farm. And, as her Mohawk name seemed to predestine, Kelly has been "carrying a house" most of her life. She has served as housekeeper for a number of people since age 15, most notably taking care of the homes in which Father Francis Vogt has resided for the last 40 years.

"She's perfect," said Father Vogt, her junior at age 88, who has provided Kelly with an apartment in his house. "She takes care of most things before they happen."

"Him and I get along pretty good," Kelly said of their long friendship.

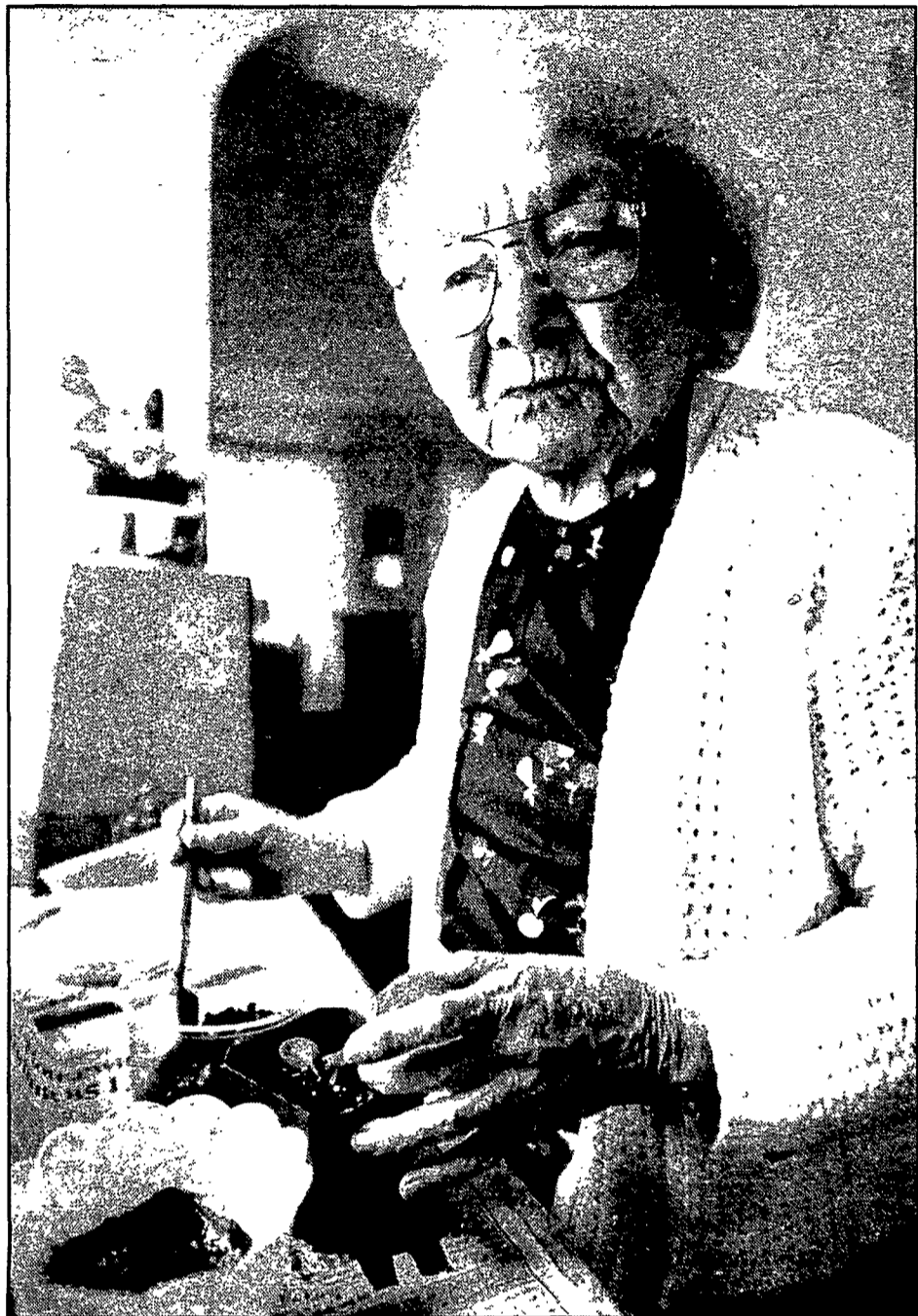
Father Vogt first hired Kelly when he was pastor of St. Bridget's Church in Rochester in 1961. He recalled that Kelly was a woman who feared nothing in the inner city, even after having her purse stolen by neighborhood thieves who mugged her. She continued as rectory housekeeper when he moved to Palmyra in 1977 to become administrator of St. Anne's Church and pastor a year later. Father Vogt retired in 1982, and he retained Kelly as his own housekeeper after he ended his pastorate.

At St. Anne's, Kelly met Mary Rutkowski, parish secretary, whom she now counts among her closest friends. Rutkowski also praised Kelly's housekeeping abilities.

"I like the smell of your ironing, Elizabeth," Rutkowski said as Kelly answered questions. Why did she choose housekeeping as a profession?

"I just like to do it," Kelly said, noting that she has no plans for retirement. "Well, what would I do if I did? I can't look at myself."

She may not want to spend much time looking at her visage, but Kelly will be the center of attention at St. Anne's on Saturday, March 31, when she celebrates her 100th birthday. Her birthday actually falls three days later on Tuesday, April 2. A 4 p.m. Mass will be followed by an open reception at the parish on the 31st. Rutkowski said Kelly's relatives will be coming from



Andrea Dixon/Staff photographer

Elizabeth Kelly replants violets at her home in Palmyra on March 1.

all around the United States. Kelly's two sons, Bernard of Colorado and Robert of Livonia will be there, as well as many grandchildren, great-grandchildren and possibly her two great-great-grandchildren. When asked how many direct descendants she had, Kelly tried to come up with a figure, and then said simply "loads."

"I'm kind of excited about the people that'll be there," she said with a smile.

Another child, Betty, passed away in 1972, she said.

Kelly explained that she left her own parents' home on the reservation in 1916 or 1917 to see what life was like in the outside world, a Mercy sister's aunt hired her and had her brought to Rochester where she met her late husband, Mitchell. She was housekeeping for a family to whom he delivered groceries, and he impressed her with his many talents, she said.

"He used to do funny tricks, and he knew how to play two, three instruments," she said, listing the violin, harp and organ.

"And he could draw," Rutkowski added, prompting Kelly to smile at the memory.

Kelly shows few of the signs of old age that people 10, 20 and even 30 years younger often show. She walks slowly, yes, occasionally leaning against counters and chairs for balance. Yet, she walks with confidence, and answers questions easily, almost never asking to have them repeated even though she wears a hearing aid.

She said that she keeps busy knitting and crocheting and enjoys reading such magazines as *Catholic Digest*. She also likes to say the rosary daily while watching a program on the Eternal World Television Network.

Kelly comes from a family of long-lived people, she said, noting her sister Bertha lived to 90, and a grandmother died one day shy of 100. Yet, she said, there were no great secrets to her long life, although she did point out that she gave up the bad habit of smoking.

At age 85,

And, oh yes, she likes her chicken.

"I don't know what it is," she finally said when asked what tips she could give those who seek the same longevity. "I wish I did. Just keep busy, I guess."

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