



L: Gunther; R: Bob

Volunteers in Motion

Printed in The Town Tribune, May 7, 2024

During National Volunteer Week in April, the New Fairfield Senior Center was pleased to honor two very special volunteers, Gunther Bohnsack and Bob Ketcham. Together these men lead a favorite exercise program at the Senior Center 3 days a week, every week. Gunther calls out and demonstrates the moves. Bob acts as DJ playing the popular energetic playlists he creates for the group, which averages 47 regulars a day. Some say it's the lively music that keeps them moving and coming back for the hour-long workout that employs weights, resistance bands, and poles.

Both Gunther and Bob bring with them a long and interesting life story.

Not long after Gunther's birth in Hamburg in 1935, Hamburg was bombed out and the family moved East. Gunther's father was killed in the war and Gunther became the man of the family at the age of eight just as the area they were living in became Russian controlled and they were being sent back to a British Zone in North Germany.

In 1951, Gunther immigrated to the United States sponsored by his mother's brother. It was a stroke of good fortune when in January of 1954 he began attending a Friday evening Soccer Club. There he met his wife-to-be, Herta. In Nov 55 he was drafted into the navy and was stationed in Norfolk, Va, and assigned onto the repair ship USS Everglades AD 24, a destroyer tender. After 2 years of duty in the Navy, he continued to see Herta and, on December 6, 1957, they were married.

Gunther learned machining, eventually opening his own Tool and Dye shop in his basement with a partner. Each of the men put in \$25 to start the business. Two years later, he bought out his partner and continued the business for another 33 years, eventually in his own building in Brookfield. "I

never could have done it without Herta's business expertise." Gunther confessed. We worked together closely every day.

Gunther's hobbies include wood crafting and Bonsai gardening. He is a long-time member and the current president of the Arion Singing Society which brought one of the most well attended Oktoberfests to the area for 19 years. Gunther and Herta are still joined at the hip. "We take care of each other."

Bob Ketcham was born in Queens Village, Long Island. He attended Our Lady of Lourdes School for first through eighth grades. He followed that with Thomas A. Edison vocational school taking all shops.

"I always liked to work," said Bob. At 12, he started making deliveries at a butcher shop and before long was in the shop, producing sausage with a crank machine. By the time he was 16, the family was living in Ridgefield, CT, and Bob worked in the Grand Union. At 18, he became a butcher there.

Bob attended Henry Abbott Technical High School for electrical training and did on-the-job training as a high school senior at Rizzo Electrical. In 1965 he became a full-time employee there. That was cut short when he was also drafted into the army in October that year. Bob took the draft letter to the Navy recruiter who said that the Navy wanted to have him, and he would take care of it.

Stationed in Norfolk, VA, Bob served on the USS Albany, a guided missile cruiser, 12-decks high with 6 decks below. They did 6 Mediterranean tours. Bob's job was motor rewinding. After that he was on a small, guided missile cruiser based in Maine and then in Boston Yard debugging. He met Gail at a roller rink in Waltham, MA. They were married in 1969. Bob continued on the reserve list during the Vietnam War.

Bob returned to Danbury and worked at Rizzo Electric as a foreman of 170 men in the shop. Among many other projects, he worked on all the fiber optics on I-95 from the New York border all the way to Rhode Island. For a year and a half, he did high voltage work dismantling the Exxon Mobil Research and Development facility.

During his retirement, through the NF Congregational Church, Bob spent 11 volunteer years preparing and serving food to the poor at the Dorothy Day Hospitality House in Danbury. During the COVID pandemic he helped keep the New Fairfield Food Pantry active at the Congregational Church.

Bob has spent a total of 12 years on the board of the Friends of the New Fairfield Senior Center as either Vice President or President.

Bob is an avid model train collector. In fact, he has 72 sets. He and Gail love their Siamese cats and have delighted in spending time on Martha's Vineyard during the summers and going on occasional ocean cruises. These days, Bob's favorite pastime is kayaking on the pond, paddling and enjoying his much-earned relaxation.