

WALTER TARNACKI
BY TONY BIGGIO

Thank you President Mariola for this recognition of our senior members. My visit with Walt and Jean Tarnacki was like sitting on your neighbors' front porch, talking and losing track of time. Walt and Jean have good humor and they are good listeners.

When people would ask Walt what he did for a living, he replied "I am a ceramic engineer." "Oh," they would say "that sounds interesting." and further discussion would cease. Walt is a ceramic engineer and his Rotary club classification for the past twenty years is chemical products.

Walt was born in Jersey City, New Jersey. His Polish immigrant parents had a fine view of the Manhattan skyline. Unfortunately, his father died when Walt was about four and his youngest brother only months old. His mother raised the boys and lived to be 98.

Walt attended a Catholic Polish grammar school and was bilingual. There is still a trace of an accent. The Polish nuns decided that Walt was not going to work in the factories, but would take math and science for college preparatory.

This training served him well when he moved to the South River High School in Central Jersey. Central Jersey was a football town just like Massillon, Ohio. Walt attributes much of his success to supplemental education. Among these was the Delta Pi Pool Hall. The pool hall supported a semi-pro basketball and football team. Also, some limited boxing.

Walt was too small to play football, but he was elected treasurer of Delta Pi. He said, since he was an alter boy, they figured he would steal less than anyone else. He laments the passing of the pool halls, "Yes, you picked up some language you didn't want your mother to hear, but you didn't learn anything bad." His favorite Bob Hope line when he spoke of juvenile delinquency was "How are we going to get the kids back into the pool halls?"

Walt dislikes what the golf cart did to golf. Caddies met influential people who could be connections later in life. Caddies worked for tips and learned to read greens and learned to know people. The golf cart ruined that.

Also, another supplemental education was picking beans during the Depression for 20 cents per bushel.

His science training helped get his first job after high school. Walt was a lab technician working for Hercules Powder Company making explosives for the British war effort.

Walt volunteered for the Navy and was a technical sergeant in the Signal Corps. He was proficient in single side band multi-channel transmitters and receivers. This was state of the art long-range communications and the units were massive. Radio signals were beamed off 90-foot towers, then off the ionosphere and into Washington. Walt was at General Douglas MacArthur's headquarters in Leyte.

After the war, Walt returned and graduated from Rutgers University with a B.A. in ceramic engineering, there, he met his wife, Jean, while she was in nurses training.

They eventually moved to Orrville, Ohio where Walt was a ceramic engineer for U.S. Stoneware, a ceramic plant. This business was bought by Norton and Walt was plant manager. Then he was plant manager for four plants in Talmadge, Stow, Tennessee, and Texas. Finally, he was general manager of seven plants, all owned by Norton. His business card read "General Manger of North America."

I believe Walt has received many distinctions, honors and recognitions, but they are hard to pry out of him. He did admit being inducted into KRONOS, which is the equivalent of Phi Beta Kappa for ceramic engineering.

Walt and Jean have been married for 55 years. They have three grown children, one boy and two girls. They have lived 45 years in the same house on Ashwood near Park View School.

You may see Walt in the downtown library. He is a voracious reader and likes current events, biographies and history. Daily he reads the New York Times and the Washington Post, as well as the Economist.

This quiet and unassuming member truly flies beneath the radar, but now you know a little more about Walt Tarnacki.