



Virginia and Bob Gilliam 50 years ago.



The Gilliams now. (Photos provided)

Gilliams at golden anniversary of ‘getting along’

By **CHRISTINA HILL**
Correspondent

In this day and age, more than half of all marriages will end in divorce, so the chances are slim for couples who dream of sharing a lifetime of marital bliss.

But one Illinois Valley couple has beaten the odds and will celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary on Wednesday, Aug. 4.

Meet Bob and Virginia Gilliam. These Illinois Valley High School sweethearts quickly fell in love and knew they had to be married – fast – as Bob was headed for military duty, and they wanted to wed before he left.

The couple will be honored guests at a 50th wedding anniversary party for friends and family on Saturday, Aug. 7 from 3 to 5 p.m. The celebration, organized by their children and spouses, will be held in the Illinois Valley Senior Center, 520 E. River St., in Cave Junction.

Bob, whose legal name is Clarence, only goes by that name when he “has to sign something.” While in high school, he ran the movie projector at the former Ivy Theater (now the location of Bi-Rite Auto Parts) as an after-school job. He even got to run the projector at the former Frontier Drive-In when it first opened.

Virginia would go to the “Illinois Valley News” office once a week and telephone people to see if they had any news.

“It was big news if someone went to Grants Pass,” she said. “That was unheard back then.”

Bob added that there

used to be 29 campgrounds between Cave Junction and Grants Pass because it was such a journey for most people.

They graduated from I.V. High School in 1953, which at the time was the current Lorna Byrne Middle School. Soon after, Bob left for the U.S. Air Force.

“When I joined the Air Force, I had been through basic training and came home on leave; and that’s when we decided we were getting married,” recalled Bob. “We told everyone we were getting married the day after tomorrow.”

Virginia added that nobody really had a chance to object. The two were married in Bob’s yard on Aug. 4, 1954. Soon after,

Bob and Virginia came home to the valley. Bob owned a Mobil service station located where Speedy Mart is now.

“I was working one day,” said Bob, “and Bob Grant, who used to own the paper, said he was having trouble with his Linotype and asked me if I knew anyone who could do it. I said, ‘Yeah, my wife knows how,’” Bob said.

“So,” added Virginia, “I went to work at the paper and retired 34 years later. I did just about everything there, from folding the papers to the billing,” she said. “I just retired at the end of January in 2003.”

While at the service station, Bob also found

worry about it. Sometimes people would stop in and help themselves to your food, and they’d leave money or a note saying what they did and who they were. Now it’s a lot different,” Virginia said.

Obviously, times have changed.

After selling the Mobil station, Bob worked for the National Park Service at Oregon Caves National Monument for the next 18 years. He took a medical retirement in 1982 after he had a heart attack. Since then he has had a six-bypass heart surgery and is “happy as a lark.”

“Since I retired I never knew what day it was,” said Bob. “If she (Virginia) was home, then I knew it had to be Friday, Saturday, or Sunday because those were the days she didn’t work.”

Retirement and ailments haven’t stopped these two from living the life they enjoy. They maintain an active life by being members of I.V. Senior Center. Virginia is also on the Laurel Cemetery Association Board; a volunteer at the Senior Thrift Store; and has been a member of Laureate Beta Beta sorority for the past 20 years.

“Basically we do whatever we want, whenever we want to,” she said. “I work in the flower beds, and he takes care of the lawn. If we decide to go somewhere, then we’ll go,” Virginia added.

In addition, they enjoy gardening and trying their luck at casinos. They are also the proud grandparents of two grandsons and one great-grandson. To celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary, they’ll have a special dinner with their family after the gathering in the senior center.

Friends and family will honor the couple during a party on Saturday, Aug. 7 in the Illinois Valley Senior Center, 520 E. River St.

he returned to Air Force duty, during which he served as an aircraft mechanic.

Six weeks later, Virginia’s mother and mother-in-law drove her cross-country so she could live with her husband where he was stationed. They’ve been together since.

For the next eight years, Bob and Virginia were stationed in various states. They moved around to Texas, Virginia, Utah, Arkansas, Alaska and Louisiana. While in Utah, they welcomed the arrival of their first son, Mike. A few years later, while stationed in Alaska, they were blessed with their second son, Mark.

After military service,

their soon-to-be-home through chance luck.

“I was at the station, and one of the Krausses came in and asked if I wanted to buy any windows,” he said. “They were going to tear down a house that was by the mill, so I asked if I could just buy the whole house for that price. They said, ‘Yeah if you move it.’ It ended up costing me more to move the house than it did to buy it,” Bob said.

Now nestled among 5 acres, Bob and Virginia admire their home and the life they’ve spent together.

“Our marriage has been like any other,” said Virginia. “We’ve had our ups and downs. We just stuck through them.”

“It seems like we kind of get along together, I guess,” Bob added with a chuckle.

A lot has changed since their younger days, they added.

“It used to be a two-lane highway going through town, and there weren’t paved sidewalks,” recalled Bob. “A lot of the stores and buildings that used to be there are gone.”

Virginia added that everyone used to know everyone else because the town population was right around 400 people.

“There wasn’t the vandalism then that there is now,” Virginia noted. “Everyone used to go and leave their houses wide open and leave for a month and never think twice or

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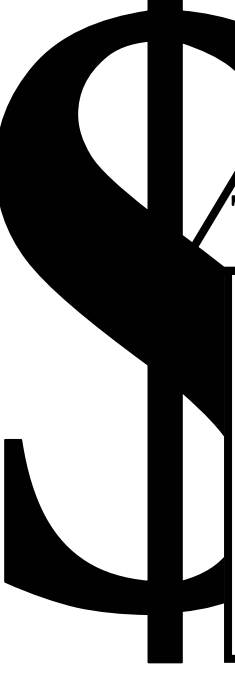
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