

Miller lived the 'American Dream'

Judy Hoyle

IVN Contributing Writer

Illinois Valley civic leader Jerry Miller, 78, died March 10, 2016, following a 9-year battle with lymphoma that few were even aware of.

During a joy filled Celebration of Life March 26 at the Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, which Miller helped build, his family shared fond memories of the dynamic patriarch and co-owner of Wild River Brewing and Pizza.

Bertha, his wife of 58 years said, "Jerry's life was the epitome of the 'American Dream.' He was hard working and made a success of his life. He was passionate about pizza, beer and friendships."

Quoting *Ecclesiastes 3*, she said, "There's never a good time to lose someone like Jerry. We had a full and wonderful life and were blessed to be able to share it. We danced building our business...and danced all over the world. We shared life for 60 years. I feel blessed and grateful. Jerry loved living in this

community. He was a wonderful husband, father and friend. My life is full to the brim."

Miller "...never saw problems, just projects," according to daughter Nancy, for whom WWJD became "What would Jerry do?" in reflection of her optimistic dad who never dwelled on the past, but concentrated on the present and "didn't believe anything couldn't be fixed."

Son Darrel said, "Love is not about being perfect. He saw value and worth in others and was an inspiration to all. Jerry Miller is gone, but his love lives on."

Lifelong friend Chuck Taylor, owner of Taylor's Sausage, related the story of how the two couples met at church in Hayward, California in the 1960s. He shared warm memories of their tribulations as members of St. Timothy Turtles basketball team.

After the Taylor's moved to the Illinois Valley in 1970, the Millers visited and then followed them here after Jerry caught two steelhead trout in the Illinois River.

Jerry first worked for Chuck at the sausage factory and Chuck

marveled at Jerry's mechanical ability to "fix all kinds of wayward problems." He expressed gratitude for their continuing friendship even after the Millers established their own business and for the opportunity for the two men to be daily sounding boards for each other until the very end. "I see Jerry and Bertha as one," he said.

Bertha and Jerry Miller won three awards from the I.V. Chamber in May 2015. They were awarded Citizens of the Year, for their many contributions to the community and support of nonprofits, including the Chamber's annual Bluegrass Festival at Lake Selmac; and organizing fish fries as fundraisers for both the Boys and Girls Club and Good Shepherd Lutheran Church.

They received Business of the Year Award for expanding their back room and making it more available for civic engagement, and the Architectural Excellence Award in recognition of that expansion and new façade.

In an interview this week, longtime I.V. Chamber of Commerce leader and Realtor Jim Frick stated,

"He was a very generous and talented entrepreneur. He loved his family and community and was probably one of the most loving husbands I've ever met."

"I met Jerry in 1976 and my wife and I used to square dance with the Millers as members of the Shamrock Squares. They were very active in that. They danced and golfed together very often.

"Jerry was always very generous, not just to the Boys and Girls Club or the Chamber but for many other community organizations. He was a founder and one of the members of the board of directors for Home Valley Bank. We talked a lot about developing businesses here and he was always working to grow his own business.

"He was starting to grow hops, and wanted to start his own brewery. He was a very loving and talented businessman, father and friend and a very devout Christian. He had tremendous faith. He was an inspiration for all the creative things he did. I loved his creativity in carving ducks and his stories about his fishing trips."

In a separate interview, Dianne Gilbertson, executive director of the Josephine County Boys and Girls Clubs said, "Jerry and Bertha have been strong supporters of the Boys and Girls Club since the early '90s. Wild River always participates in Taste of the Rogue and Taste of the I.V.

"Not many people know that, seven years ago, we were contemplating closing the Club. Five I.V. families, including the Millers, stepped up and made a pledge to support the club. They made a community decision to help the kids stay in a positive safe place. Due to their commitment, we instituted new policies and procedures and the Club stayed open.

"Jerry and Bertha love the kids and the community. It's a huge sad loss for the community, he was a good guy. Jerry was one of those who I would call when I really, really needed something. We're going to miss him. He was one of the heart and soul supporters for the Club."

The Archive Zone: by Hillary Mohr and the *Illinois Valley News* archives

This week we venture 67 years into the past, the date: March 31, 1949. The world was recovering from the Second World War and the Valley seemed to be moving forward in a positive direction. New businesses opened, farmers were preparing soil for summer crops and spring sports were just around the corner. Get settled in and comfortable as we journey into the Archive Zone.

Committee meeting on hospital tonight. The hospital planning committee met Friday at Penguin on Caves Highway with several interested members and quests present. The general opinion seems to be that this community needs a small hospital and that funds can be raised to build it if everyone is willing to work

towards that end.

Optometrist to open office in Cave Junction. Dr. T. Winston Smith of Grants Pass will maintain an office in the J. S. Whitehead building for convenience of Valley patrons, commencing Thursday, April 7. Dr. Smith come highly recommended to this community and since 1946 was associated with the late Dr. Scheetz until his death last year, but continues to maintain the office in Grants Pass. Before the war he practiced in Los Angeles and during his Army life was in charge of the refractions and eye clinic of La Guardia airport hospital at Fort Totter.

Former Selma resident dies after short illness. Mrs. C. E. Dougherty, who recently visited her parents, was suddenly

called home to Richmond, California, Tuesday, March 22, to find her husband, Clarence Dougherty, stricken with a cerebral hemorrhage and died Thursday, March 24, the same day the body of their son, Clarence, Jr., "Sonny" Dougherty, arrived in San Francisco from New York. Father and son will be laid to rest side by side in the Golden Gate National Cemetery.

Plans underway for Cub Pack Circus. The Cub Pack No. 20, committee meeting was held Monday evening in Kerby High School for the purpose of discussing plans for a circus to be presented by the Cubs soon. Suggestions on ideas were given and if carried out will be something worthwhile to see.



(Photo by Dan Mancuso, *Illinois Valley News*)

Two egg hunters hustle during the Lions Club Easter Egg Hunt Sunday, March 27.



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