

THE LINKSLETTER

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Lynn Hunter/Chris Denham

Deborah Thomas holds George's ladder as he attaches a homemade woodpecker house to a tree in CT.



My Dad...My Hero!

by Lynn Hunter

Our neighbor, George L. Thomas, passed away last December at 96 years of age. As I learned from his oldest daughter, Deborah F. Thomas, also our neighbor on Todd Court, George had led quite an amazing life. Deborah wanted me to share her memories of her Dad with you so that we all might know what a special person

he was. I think I can safely say that George was and will always be Deborah's hero.

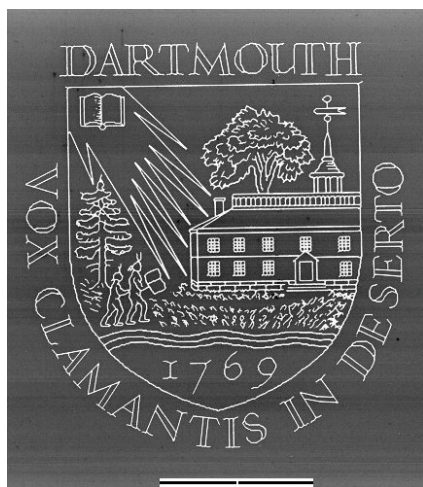
Born on May 12, 1912 in Waterbury, CT, George was an athletic and accomplished young man. At Crosby High School in Waterbury, CT, he not only participated in football, track, and swimming, but also attained the honor of

Eagle Scout, holding that rank longer than any other scout in CT. While at Dartmouth College (g.1934), George ran track; his teams won championships in boxing and wrestling. While in college, he also earned his pilot's license, flying being an important skill in his life's story.

My Dad...My Hero (continued)

George married Katharine Meyerhans and together they raised three lovely daughters, Deborah, Susan, and Wendy. Throughout his life as a dad, George was always happiest to be with his daughters, especially after Katharine died of cancer in 2006. George worked as president and general manager of two companies: Electric Motor and Repair Co. and Tubecraft Inc. But in 1956, there was a terrible flood in which several of his employees drowned. George was deeply affected by this loss; Deborah feels that the flood almost “broke” her dad. It is no wonder that years later, he aspired to an entirely different career...teaching.

Along the way, George was very active in his hometown of Cheshire, CT. He was a town constable, one of the founders of the local fire department, a member of the Masonic Temple Lodge, town committee member, president/member of the PTA, member of the Waterbury Chamber of Commerce and Kiwanis Club, secretary/treasurer of the Naugatuck Valley Dartmouth Assoc. and Dartmouth CT State Alumni.



Then in 1982 at the age of 57, George began teaching. As a gifted educator and great storyteller, George became a much-beloved teacher to his

many students. His obvious love for teaching and love of children enabled him to substitute teach in all disciplines until retirement at the age of 94! George was known for distributing treats to the children and for helping the secretaries and teachers so that they could have some extra time. Deborah, a veteran teacher of 41 years, even retired *before* her Dad did.

It is no wonder that on his last day, classes were suspended as the principal escorted George down the halls of the school and as all of the children waved goodbye to him from the school windows. As a final tribute, the class of '06 dedicated their yearbook to George, honoring him with a student-delivered eulogy, a standing ovation at the graduation Benediction, and eventually packing the funeral home in Cheshire at his death three years later.

Moving to The Links in April, 2007 was a turning point in George's life, leaving students and friends behind, but he knew it was the right decision when our community welcomed him with open arms. He loved it here, living with Deborah, and having his youngest daughter, Wendy, nearby in Emmitsburg. George planted over 200 flowers and bulbs in his new Todd Court home, beautifying our Links neighborhood.

Deborah shared one last “untold” story about George at his funeral. Even the family had not known of George's heroism while he was still a student at Dartmouth. Before he had been issued his *official* pilot's license, George was flying a shabby Veteran land-sea plane on Sept. 8, 1934 when he noticed the cruise ship “Morro Castle” on fire off the coast of Atlantic City, NJ. He landed the aircraft in the raging Jersey swells five miles

offshore, swimming to rescue three tired victims and flying them to safety on land. Later, freed of charges for not having a proper license for carrying passengers, George was applauded in the courtroom for displaying "courage and stamina...laudable American characteristics."

Deborah graduated from Gettysburg College in 1964 with a major in psychology and a minor in education. At Trinity College (Hartford, CT) she earned a Master's Degree in 1970. She most definitely inherited her Dad's 'joie de vivre' and sense of adventure/accomplishment. A former teacher in Windsor, CT and world traveler, she has visited 34 countries,



among them Japan and India. Her collection of diaries, photographs, and memorabilia were displayed for the enrichment of Deborah's world geography students. Always certain that teaching was her aspiration, Deborah was a runner-up for CT State Teacher-of-the-Year, was honored as "Teacher of the Year" by The Windsor Jaycees, and was featured four times in "Who's Who: America's Best Teachers."

Like her Dad, Deborah has a pilot's license, although she no longer flies. Discovering that she was gifted in riflery, Deborah became a certified NRA instructor, teaching competitive target shooting for 21 years to 6th-9th graders. In addition to these activities, Deborah did some 40 plays in amateur and professional theatre. Over the years as teacher-by-day, actress-by-night, she achieved kudos as best actress in the play "Shadowbox" in a CT statewide competition, as well as a member of "best ensemble" at the New England Festival.

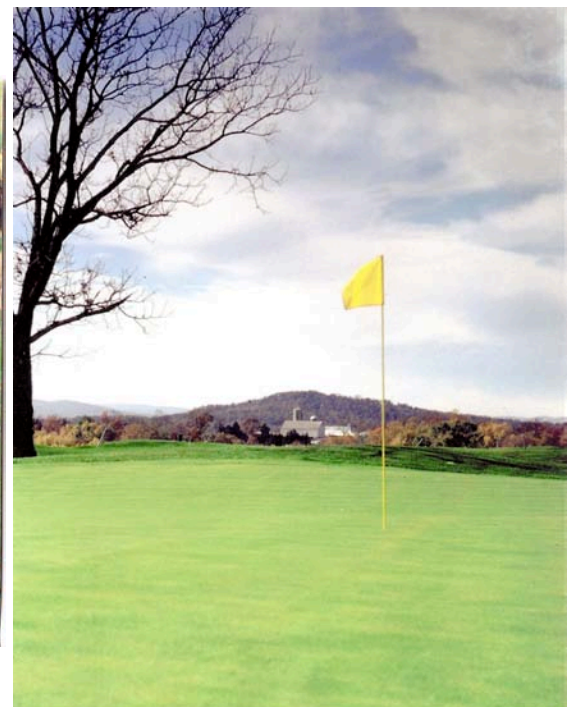
George and Katharine taught their daughters to aspire to any noble goal and to listen to their heart's desire. They approved of Deborah, Susan, and Wendy's doing anything that boys could do. Since they loved life and all of its possibilities and since they communicated this to their girls by example, it is no surprise that Deborah's love of learning and of nurturing a positive self-image were passed on to her many students.

As Deborah's life without her Dad goes on, her days are spent gardening, painting, and walking. As she reminisces about her parents, spends time with her cats Ollie and Chessie, she searches for a new star to follow here at The Links. Wearing her Dad's signet ring on one finger and her Mom's garnet ring on the other, Deborah enjoys her quiet life for now. I just know that her next adventure is just around the corner. After all, she's a Gemini and George, her hero, would want it that way!

Ever wonder how our golf course,
THE LINKS AT GETTYSBURG,
began? In the year 1997, it looked like
this! Read all about it on pages 7 & 8.
Many thanks go out to Bonni and Rick
for sharing these incredible photos.







The History of “The Links at Gettysburg”

by Lynn Hunter



A Dream Come True

This Spring, 10 years ago, a dream came true for Bonni and Rick Klein. They opened the stellar golf course called The Links at Gettysburg. Many a golfer has enjoyed the course in these years. The Links has hosted tournaments (The Duramed), athletes (Redskins, Colts, Orioles), politicians (Newt Gingrich, Denny Hassinger), supreme justices, a U.S. Marshall, rock ‘n’ rollers, and Nancy Lopez and her husband, Ray Knight. Each evening as the sun sets over the mountain, the beauty of the course echoes with many memories that came before.

The original property of 190 acres was purchased in 1972 by Rick’s parents, Delores and Charles Klein. The farm consisted of the property from Lousy Run Creek to Rock Creek, going West. When Rick’s uncle saw that the bricks on the old farm house were imprinted with a daisy, he was able to trace their history back to England. As cargo ships came to America, they would use the bricks as ballast (stabilization for the ship). Farmers in need of bricks would travel to Baltimore’s harbor and bring them back by the wagon load. Initially the Klein family considered refurbishing the abandoned property for the ProShop. After much soul-searching, they decided to tear it down and to start anew.

When perc tests on the land failed, Charles Klein decided not to establish the housing community he had hoped to build. It was in 1996 that Rick’s idea to build a golf course instead began to take shape. His good friend and former lacrosse coach, Bernie Barrett, planted the seed when he and Rick were on a golf weekend in Williamsburg. Coincidentally, the Hill property also became available, providing additional acreage for the project. After doing market studies, consulting with family members, dealing with the neighbors of the property, and coming up with a name, Bonni and Rick decided to go ahead with the course. Rick’s still grateful that his “loving and brilliant wife” vetoed the name “The Mason Dixon Golf Club!” And, it still seems surreal that this happened over ten years ago.

The Kleins were living in Finksburg in Carroll County at the time with their young children Trevor, Savannah and Charlie. In those early planning/constructing years, Rick drove up almost every day to follow the progress, always faithfully followed by Dakota, the family’s Rotweiller. Rick’s biggest concern was that the 300+ acres were mostly red shale and rocks. Rick worried: “Would grass *really* grow here?” He put his faith in the future, did much research about types of grass seed, strategically *utilized* the rocks, and hoped for the best. The journey had begun.



The designers of the golf course were Lindsay Irvin and Steve Klein, Rick's cousin. As bids came in, the Kleins went with the local company, Riddle and Sons. Rick had a "gut feeling" that they would be superior, previously having constructed both Carroll Valley and Mt. Branch. Plus they came in with a very nice bid.

The permit process went surprisingly smoothly. As Rick says: "We lived in a more reasonable world" in 1996." The Mt. Joy Township was so cooperative. Sam Dayhoff was a wonderful supervisor. Harold Bebe facilitated the state land development process, giving the "go ahead" and even sending a representative to the meeting. He advised the Kleins to stay in touch with the local inspector and to carefully follow the guidelines. Except for a scary encounter with The Fish and Wildlife folks (when guns and handcuffs came out!), all ended peacefully with a trip to Harrisburg, an explanation, and the payment of a small fine.

The process for establishing a golf course consists of six steps: mass grading, establishing the ponds, providing irrigation and drainage, stripping



the top soil and then putting it back, fine tuning the sand traps, and planting the grass seed. Rick's goal was to have 8 holes seeded by the end of 1997 (holes

1,2,9,10,11,12,13 and 18). The remaining holes were completed in 1998 and early 1999. When it opened, The Links at Gettysburg was a piece of land from the family estate transformed into an amazing golf course.

Bent grass has been used from the beginning as most of the finer golf courses have this type of planting. As a result, The Links at Gettysburg has turned out pretty much as Bonni and Rick envisioned it. They would like to make improvements and to recreate the beautiful waterfall to the left of hole #12 (see Savannah in photo below), but for now they are content and pleased with things as they are. They are grateful to groundskeeper John Long and to employees like Sammy Zepeda who has been here since the beginning.

The Kleins must be proud to have brought a source of natural beauty and invigorating recreation to so many. Bravo for their dream come true!

