

“Dad was known as Smiling Jack. He had the knack of sizing people up... He could ask you 20 questions and know the history of your life.”

More about JOHN J. “JACK” GING JR.’s life:

OBITUARIES • C4



PITTSBURGH TRIBUNE-REVIEW CITY®ION

SECTION

Sunday,
December 28,
2008

INSIDE Some New Stanton landowners want to become part of Hempfield C3 • Obituaries C4-C6



ERIC HEYL

A tribute to the Boring, the bad, the backward

Today we celebrate the accomplishments of people who made us shake our heads in disbelief at their achievements.

Today we celebrate the doofuses. For those unfamiliar with the word, check out an online urban dictionary. A doofus is someone who behaves in a foolish, stupid or incompetent manner; the word is believed to be derived from “doo,” which is German for “silly.”

In Western Pennsylvania, there was no shortage of people displaying supreme doofus behavior in 2008. Some of the most glaring examples:

■ Aaron and Christine Boring — Perturbed that their privacy was invaded when an exterior shot of their home appeared on the popular Google Street View mapping feature, the Franklin Park couple sued Google in April.

In doing so, the Borings drew national headlines, thousands of views of their home on Google, and references from caustic columnists months after the lawsuit was filed. The Borings violated their own privacy far more than did Google.

■ Ashley Todd — Claiming she was viciously attacked in Bloomfield by someone who noticed a John McCain bumper sticker on her car, Todd proffered as evidence a “B” scratched onto her cheek. She blamed a Barack Obama supporter.

Police were instantly puzzled as to why the letter was backward — as if someone had looked into a mirror while performing the cheek calligraphy.

Almost immediately, Todd confessed to fabricating the assault.

■ Nicholas Borrelli — It wasn’t the marijuana plants growing in the Bishop Canavin High School teacher’s Munhall home that concerned police. It was the handguns, long guns and large containers of various chemicals.

Oh, and the thousands of improvised explosive devices, too. How could I have neglected to mention them? Without the IEDs, it’s entirely possible the county bomb squad wouldn’t have been summoned.

■ Santonio Holmes — Other people outfit their interior of their cars with GPS devices, but the Steelers wide receiver outfitted his with several marijuana-filled cigars. Apparently lacking the patience to refrain from taking after practice until he arrives home, Holmes was charged with a drug violation in October after police pulled him over.

■ Monique Reed — When Lauren Newton complained about the quality of the hair weave that Reed gave her, the Washington County woman flew into a rage. Reed shot Newton in the buttocks, which caused her to face aggravated assault charges and caused Newton to understandably seek a hair stylist less sensitive to criticism.

■ John Harrison Mainhart — It was bad enough that Mainhart, 28, of Richland faced a misdemeanor charge in June of tattooing a minor without her parents’ permission.

It was worse that he misspelled the tattoo, leaving the girl with a permanent homage to geometry on her body. He inked “angle” instead of “angel” into her skin.

Next time, pay attention, dude.

Construction worker dies in fall

He proposed to mother of their child Christmas Day

BY F.A. KRIFT AND BY RICK WILLS
TRIBUNE-REVIEW

A South Side man fell four stories to his death at a downtown construction site Saturday morning, less than an hour after he kissed his fiancée on the cheek and left for work.

Scott David Oswald, 39, had just begun his work day at the Keystone Lofts build-

ing in the 900 block of Liberty Avenue when he slipped off the building’s roof just before 8 a.m., said Sgt. Robert Miller of the Zone 2 Pittsburgh police.

Miller said there was no railing along the edge of the roof.

“He was working in that building and went to the roof, which was slick from the rain. He fell and landed in the alley (Exchange Way),” Miller said.

Pittsburgh homicide detectives are investigating.

Oswald’s fiancée, Brenda Gelzhiser, said yesterday that he asked her on Christmas Day to marry him after nearly six years together. They have a 5-year-old daughter.

“I just can’t believe he’s gone,” Gelzhiser said. “He’s too young for this. How do you tell a 5-year-old girl that her

daddy’s gone? And she loves him so much.”

Before he left about 7:15 a.m., Oswald kissed Gelzhiser while she slept on the couch in their Baldauf Street home. The house is in the same block where he grew up.

Under the couple’s Christmas tree yesterday afternoon were a small wooden plane and wagon that Oswald built. The Christmas tree sat on a platform that he

SEE FALL • C7



The Hurricane Lounge in Pittsburgh’s Hill District brought world-class performers to Centre Avenue in the 1950s.

Leaders aim to restore life to the jazz scene

Community activists plan to use music to draw people and businesses to the neighborhood.

BY KYLE LAWSON
POINT PARK NEWS SERVICE

With her sultry voice, Carolyn Perteete hushed a low rumble of conversation inside the Hill District’s Blakey Program Center on a recent Sunday night.

The statuesque singer in black boots and a long, tight skirt wore her wavy hair parted on the side, similar to hairstyles of the be-boppers who once packed clubs in the Hill. Her voice sounded strong, but quiet and controlled, as she sang the 1920s jazz classic “Softly as in a Morning Sunrise.”

“I always feel like I was born at the wrong time,” Perteete, 28, said later. “You have to have a lot of appreciation for what came before you.”

From Prohibition to the 1968 assassination of Martin Luther King Jr., diverse crowds danced, drank and mingled into the night in the Hill District. They were entertained by world-class jazz performed by local heroes such as Billy Eckstine and icons including Duke Ellington.

Now, community leaders are using jazz again to draw people back to the neighborhood. Perteete’s performance was part of an event held every other week that pays tribute to the Hurricane Lounge, a storied venue that once contributed to a vibrant jazz scene.

“Jazz has faded in our neighborhoods,” said Evan Frazier, CEO of the nonprofit Hill House. “We need to make deliberate attempts to keep the music and the musicians here.”

King’s assassination sparked riots in the Hill District, a turning point for the neighborhood. Many local businesses were

SEE JAZZ • C7

VFW posts have eye on youth

Some are closing post homes and bars as their numbers dwindle.

BY BRIAN C. RITTMAYER
TRIBUNE-REVIEW NEWS SERVICE

The Veterans of Foreign Wars post in the Armstrong County town of Leechburg was known as a place to get cheap drinks and was drawing an undesirable crowd. That changed after an effort was launched to clean up the post, said its junior vice commander, Patty Ameno, a Navy veteran of Vietnam.

“I feel that the VFW is not only a place where a person who’s a member can get an inexpensive drink and socialize — it’s an outreach organization for the community,” Ameno said.

Emphasizing the VFW’s core mission of remembering deceased veterans by honoring living ones will be vital to keeping the 109-year-old organization alive, say those involved in the organization nationally and locally.

Nationwide, the VFW claims about 1.6 million members, down 100,000 from 2007, said Troy Danderson, associate director for membership at the organization’s Kansas City headquarters. The organization has closed about 100 posts over the past two years.

About half of those posts have buildings, called post homes; of those, only about a third have a bar, sometimes called a canteen.

VFW Post 444 in Derry, Westmoreland County, closed its bar in August and is looking to sell its building, but the post still exists, said post Commander Chris Johnston.

SEE VFW • C7

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A WEEKLY
FEATURE
LOOKING AT
PITTSBURGH’S
PAST

FAYETTE NATIVE NEARLY MADE IT INTO OVAL OFFICE

BY MIKE WERESCHAGIN
TRIBUNE-REVIEW

As close calls go, Andrew Stewart’s in 1848 was a doozy.

In a roundabout way, the Fayette County native came within 12 votes of the presidency.

Stewart (1791-1872) studied law at Washington College — now Washington & Jefferson College — en route to a political career that began with his election to the state House of Representatives in 1815. He won a U.S. House seat in 1820, and served most of the following 30 years in the House, according to his congressional biography.

Near the end of his Congressional tenure, the nation was beginning to fracture over the legality of slavery. The Whig Party chose its 1848 presidential nominee Zachary Taylor, a military hero and slave owner who opposed expanding slavery into newly conquered territory. Some

Whigs worried over Taylor’s allegiance to his new party, though, according to the Miller Center of Public Affairs at the University of Virginia.

Party leaders turned to Pennsylvania for help, asking the influential delegation to choose a loyal Whig to join Taylor on the ticket. Taylor won the state delegation’s vote 14-12 on the first ballot. Rather than call another vote to get unanimous consent, though, the delegate chairman “hurried back into the Convention and reported that they had failed to agree,” according to a short autobiography in Stewart’s 1872 book, “The American System.”

The party nominated Millard Fillmore of New York for vice president instead of Stewart. Taylor and Fillmore won and, 16 months after their inauguration, Fillmore ascended to the presidency when Taylor died from “a virulent stomach ailment,” according to the Miller Center.



PHOTO COURTESY OF MARCI MCGINNIS

Newspaper articles show Rep. Andrew Stewart took on the role of his party’s attack dog, despite his rejection from the 1848 presidential election ticket.

Newspaper articles from the campaign show Stewart took on the role of his party’s attack dog, despite his rejection from the ticket. He took to the floor of the House to denounce the Democratic candidate, Lewis

PITT FACT

From 1818 to 1820, between his time in the state House and the U.S. House, Andrew Stewart served as an appointee of President James Monroe. Was he appointed as:

- A) U.S. attorney, Western District of Pennsylvania
- B) Commerce secretary
- C) U.S. ambassador to Cuba
- D) Federal judge, 3rd Circuit Court of Appeals

Y&R/SN

SOURCE: BIOGRAPHICAL DIRECTORY OF THE UNITED STATES CONGRESS

Cass, for drawing multiple government salaries and stipends at once, according to an August 1848 issue of The Hudson River Chronicle.

“A great patriot, this Extra-Allowance Cass!” the paper wrote.

Historians rank Fillmore as among the worst presidents, putting him among the ranks of Warren G. Harding and Franklin Pierce.

Still, Fillmore isn’t as reviled as Pennsylvania’s sole contribution to the presidency: James Buchanan. Buchanan’s inaction as the Union fell apart is often cited as the worst failure of any president.

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CITY & REGION

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West Mifflin VFW Quatermaster Mike Maurer (left) and Commander Chuck Krebs lead Intrepid Post 914, which has never had a bar or a building. Members meet at the Thompson Run Athletic Association. Not having a post home frees members to focus on the VFW's mission, Maurer says.

VFW posts have eye on youth

VFW • FROM C1

"A lot of people thought when we shut the bar down that the VFW post went away. It's just a supporting element of it. It has nothing to do with the mission of the VFW," said Johnston, 63, an Army veteran who retired in 2005 after a 40-year career.

The bar was closed because of a lack of business from its aging members, Johnston said.

"Our future plans are to buy a piece of ground and build a one-story, handicapped-accessible property that can be more conducive to the VFW supports like blood drives, spaghetti dinners, stuff like that," he said.

With 140 members, the West Mifflin post, chartered in 1981, has never had a bar or a building. With a majority of World War II veterans as members, it meets at the Thompson Run Athletic Association.

"I'm very encouraged particularly with the way our own post is going. We are not tied to a club," said Mike Maurer, quatermaster of Intrepid Post 914 in West Mifflin.

"We can direct more of our efforts to the post's primary mission of honoring the dead by helping the living through our various community outreach programs, youth activity programs and our hospital assistance programs," he said. "We might be smaller than a post that has a large hall and a bar, but as the number of veterans decreases in the future, we'll be longer lived."

With about 2,300 total veteran and social members and a large facility, VFW Post 92 in Lower Burrell, Westmoreland County, is among the largest. About 10 years ago, in the spirit of keeping military camaraderie strong, the post began limiting social memberships — members who are not veterans or who do not meet

Eligibility

To qualify for membership in the Veterans of Foreign Wars, returning soldiers:

- Must be U.S. citizens
- Must be currently in the U.S. military or have honorable discharge
- Must have served overseas during a conflict for which they received an expeditionary medal, a campaign medal or ribbon, or imminent danger/hostile fire pay; and/or received the SSBN Deterrent Patrol insignia, the combat infantryman badge, the combat medic badge, the combat action ribbon, the combat action badge, the Air Force combat action medal or Air Force expeditionary service ribbon with gold border; and/or served 30 consecutive days of duty in Korea or 60 days of non-consecutive duty in Korea; and/or be currently deployed in an area that qualifies for VFW membership.

■ Cost: Annual membership cost varies by post. Life memberships range from \$425 for those age 30 and younger, to \$170 for those 81 and over, and an 11-month or 23-month installment plan is available.

SOURCE: VFW

VFW membership requirements — to those with some kind of military background. Existing social members without military ties were allowed to stay if they kept paying their dues, said post Commander Rich Ratajczak, a Vietnam Army Aviation veteran.

Keeping the post as military as possible increases respect for the organization and leads to less trouble, which isn't tolerated, Ratajczak said.

World War II veterans still make up the bulk of the VFW's membership. Only about 140,000 are 38 or younger, Danderson said.

There were 11 million eligible World War II veterans, 1.5 million from Korea and 2.5 million from Vietnam, and about 800,000 have been deployed since Sept. 11, 2001, said Danderson. Unlike in past conflicts, many of those soldiers are being deployed more than once.

"What's been happening with the VFW in general is the bulk of our membership is made up of

World War II veterans, and there were a large number of those veterans because of how they fought wars back then. You needed that large number of troops," Maurer said. "What's happening is there are no longer a large number of veterans being generated, so, as a consequence, posts are getting smaller as the older World War II veterans die off. There aren't enough new veterans in large numbers to replace them."

About 15 percent of eligible veterans from current conflicts are joining the VFW, which Danderson said is a high rate.

"It's a number that is larger than the contingent from Vietnam. It's closer to what we saw with World War II," he said. "A lot of them want to know they're giving back to the military community. They like community service."

There's about 100 members in Post 7376 in Jefferson, Butler County, but only six to seven show for meetings, said Com-

By the numbers

2007 VFW membership: 1.7 million
2008 membership: 1.6 million
Membership lost: About 6 percent
Total posts: 8,100
Posts with homes: About 4,000
Posts with bars: About 1,355

SOURCE: VFW NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS

mander Ron Harbison, 80, a Korean War Marine veteran.

"Not only are we down, but our members aren't participating," Harbison said. "We're not getting in the young members like we should. We're not getting Vietnam members. We have some, and they're helping out. We're not getting Desert Storm and those guys."

Most officers of Post 4843 in Manor, Armstrong County, are in their 70s, 80s and 90s. Post Commander Harold Thevenin, 77, a Navy veteran of World War II, is there every morning, for three to four hours a day, doing the work he isn't paid for and no one else wants to do.

Some young veterans are joining but they don't take an active part, he said.

"The biggest problem, I think, is they think these VFWs belong to World War II veterans. It does not belong to World War II veterans. It belongs to veterans of all wars," he said.

When Ratajczak joined the Lower Burrell post, he was a Vietnam veteran among World War II veterans. Now the Vietnam generation is in charge. Soldiers who served in Iraq and Afghanistan will have to get involved to keep the post running.

"That's exactly what we need. I'm sure that's going to happen," he said.

Worker dies in fall

FALL • FROM C1

constructed, Gelzhiser said. Their daughter's Christmas toys, including a Barbie Dream House that Oswald set up, lay on the living room floor.

"Those two were head over heels for each other," Gelzhiser said.

Allegheny County property-tax records list the owners of the building, which once housed Keystone Picture Frame Co., as Neil F. Brady, Joseph V. Martier and Karina M. Chavez. Attempts to reach them were not successful yesterday. Arriba Construction is renovating the structure to create 12 units in the building. Construction company officials could not be reached for comment yesterday.

Marcia Rodriguez-Kraus, a Howard Hanna agent sales representative for Keystone Lofts, said several people were working at the building yesterday.

"This is so unfortunate," Rodriguez-Kraus said about Os-

wald's death.

Oswald is the second worker since October to die after falling from a Downtown building. That month, Brian Obermeier, 33, of Etna fell from the Commonwealth Trust Co. and landed inside a fenced-in construction area in the 300 block of Fourth Avenue.

The number of construction workers who have fallen to their deaths has increased recently, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

At least 442 construction workers died nationally as a result of falls in 2007. In Pennsylvania, falls during construction claimed 25 lives, five more than the previous year.

Oswald graduated from Brashers High School. He worked as a truck driver and dreamed of fixing up the family home with the amazing view, "making it immaculate," Gelzhiser said, and possibly selling it.

"We had our future together planned out," she said.

Leaders aim to restore life

JAZZ • FROM C1

looted and burned. Marvin Prentice, senior vice president and chief operating officer of the Hill House, grew up in the Hill and remembers the impact riots had on the neighborhood's economy.

"After that, there was still some commerce, but it wasn't ever at the same level it was prior," Prentice said. "After 1968, the white folks were afraid to come."

By the 1980s, massive layoffs from the collapse of the region's steel industry hurt the area again, and drug dealing swept through the neighborhood like an epidemic. Slowly, the remaining jazz clubs began to close.

Now, construction is planned or under way — for the Penguins arena, a library on Centre Avenue, a YMCA building and a proposed grocery store — and community leaders are seeking to rebuild a sense of community, too.

Development in the neighborhood could lead to the reopening of restaurant and music venues, Prentice said. There's talk of reopening the Crawford Grill, a shuttered jazz club along Wylie Avenue. The Grill, which closed in 2002, was the Hill's last jazz club, and a spin-off of the club at Station Square closed in 2006.

Terri Baltimore, president of neighborhood development for the Hill House, said her plan was to

recreate the Hurricane in the Hill House gymnasium, at 1508 Wylie Ave., with help from Spike Wolff, an architecture professor at Carnegie Mellon University. "When you tell (architects) that, they look at you like you're kind of nuts," she said.

On this Sunday night, the stage in the middle of the darkened room was softened by green and red lights and white draperies. A five-piece band of Pittsburgh all-stars played jazz standards such as "Footprints" while black-and-white photos of the Hurricane, and its musicians and club-goers, were projected on screens.

Frankie Harris, 54, sat front and center, enjoying the concert with a friend. She grew up in Moon but said she spent many nights at the Crawford Grill.

"I saw George Benson there in the late 1970s," Harris said. "He was my connector from the old jazz influence into present time."

Nelson Harrison, a trumpeter who has played gigs in Pittsburgh for more than 40 years, said he remembers when the Hill District drew jazz fans from throughout Western Pennsylvania — and sometimes farther away.

"People would be grilling barbecue at 4 a.m.," he said. "Downtown politicians were partying all night, and there was always an after-hours club. Everyone was smiling, and it was all about love."

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