

BY BILL WYLIE
PHOTOS BY ERIN MORONEY LA BELLE

the ROMEOS

JULIET MIGHT CALL THEM GRANDPA, BUT WHO CARES?
ALL THE WORLD'S A PLAYGROUND FOR THESE BUSY
RETIRED EXECUTIVES



Bill Shakespeare wouldn't recognize these ROMEOs. Nor would Juliet. If the 17th-century playwright happened to drop in on one of their luncheons, which is highly unlikely, he would be baffled by the food, their clothes and certainly the conversation. There are no plaintive pleas from balconies or poetic speeches about the philosophy of life. Instead, the talk around the table focuses on the Steelers, Pirates, Penguins, politics, tennis, golf, bridge and other timely issues of modern life.

Who are these ROMEOs? Here's a clue: gray hair is plentiful—sometimes sparse—and arthritis is no stranger to many of these ROMEOs—the Retired Old Men Eating Out!

Sorry to disappoint those of you looking for a romantic hero, but that's the way it is with this group. Nevertheless, each of these men is a hero in his own right, because one doesn't get to the comfort of the Golden Years without earning it. These fellows have done that.

Actually, there are a number of formal and informal ROMEO groups around the country, including two that we know of in the Mt. Lebanon area. One meets on alternate Mondays at Peter's Place in Bridgeville and the other on Thursdays at Applebee's in Scott Towne Center on Greentree Road.

Bob Seli of the Thursday group said his brother attends ROMEO luncheons in Charlotte, N.C. "Some of the groups wear little patches on their shirts," he said.

To find out what this is all about, we talked to some of the Monday group, and this is what we found out:

Why be a ROMEO? You can only park in front of a TV set so long. Even Walter Cronkite's nightly analyses of world events are gone, and those younger guys who replaced him—well, if you're

over 65, nothing is quite as good any more as it used to be.

To put it bluntly, camaraderie with colleagues is priceless, and the older you get, the harder it is to find those associations. That's where the ROMEOs enter the picture. Their luncheons every other week provide a forum for discussion of whatever subjects the guys want to talk about. It's strictly informal, and it's a wonderful outlet for someone who has left the business and professional world and misses those contacts. You can say this is another way to eliminate boredom from retirement.

There's a variety of expertise at these luncheons. Vaughn Gordy, a food broker for many years, can provide an insight into why sugar prices keep inching up, down, or whatever. Or, he could comment on Mt. Lebanon history over the past half-century or so because he grew up here, graduated from Mt. Lebanon High School and remains a resident. On a more serious note, he might recall a war story or two from his days as a navigator on B-24s, flying out of Italy during World War II.

And then there are computers! Four years ago Gordy wanted no part of the high-tech revolution. Then his family gave him a com-

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Connections: Several members of the Monday group that meets at Peter's Place once worked together. Many enjoy tennis and bridge.

Others have been very involved as volunteers with Mt. Lebanon municipal projects. They are (from left) Bill Lewis, Bill Henry, Howard Spicher, Dr. James Dattilo, John Troan, Tony Waterman, George Stanley, Bob McCallum, Jack Conner and Tom Halloran.





puter for Christmas. Now he's addicted to the keyboard.

Bill Shakespeare would have something to say to John Troan, since both made their living with a pen—actually a typewriter and later a computer in John's case. Troan served as editor of *The Pittsburgh Press* during its greatest years and earlier was a science writer for the paper and the Scripps-Howard bureau in Washington.

Troan can talk about his close relationship with Jonas Salk when the polio vaccine was being developed, or his contacts with James Webb, who headed the space program, and John Glenn, the pioneer astronaut, or any number of celebrities who crossed his path as a journalist. You can read all about it in his book, "Passport to Adventure," which was published last year.

There's a lot of nostalgia in this crowd. The downtown skyline triggers mixed emotions for Bill Henry when the Gulf Building comes into view. As executive vice president, he helped run the huge oil company that dominated the business scene here for so many years until Gulf was acquired by Chevron. Now the Gulf Building is a sober reminder of the corporate giant that is no more.

Troan can empathize with Henry because the *Press* suffered a similar fate. "I'll never understand what happened to either the *Press* or Gulf," Henry says.

Tom Halloran knows how John and Bill feel about their former employers, although U.S. Steel, where he worked for 36 years in sales, is still around. But the industry that once dominated this region's economy is a mere shadow of its former self. If you don't believe it, drive up the Mon Valley and look for all those mills that no longer exist.

So much for living in the past. Halloran would rather talk about tennis or bridge. He has been a key figure in the tennis program in Mt. Lebanon for 50 years and is an avid bridge player.

Bob McCallum is another tennis player and co-founder of the Mt. Lebanon Tennis Association who enjoys the luncheons. After serving as an FBI agent for eight years, he got into the insurance business. He and his wife, the former Shirley Jeffery, a graduate of Mt. Lebanon High School, have lived here since 1948.

The luncheon talk can be a bit weighty at times. Henry, who serves on the Mt. Lebanon Economic Development Council,



(Top) The "official" ROMEOS meet Thursday at Applebee's, where the conversation ranges from current events to jokes. Pictured, clockwise from bottom right, are Tom Halloran, Paul Frock, Hugh Maloy, Joe Radich, Bob Seli, Don Hess, Bill Wallace, Frank Kohler and Mark Napoleoni.

(Above left) Members of both groups can count on sharing a few laughs, as Tom Halloran, a member of both, attests.

(Above right) After lunch it's time for bridge, seeing what the market's doing or maybe even catching a nap.

might be looking for ideas to make business more viable on Washington Road. Or, Bill Lewis, known as one of the "municipal watchdogs" at commission and school board meetings, might introduce a controversial issue for discussion.

Actually, school board members can relax. Bill hasn't attended a meeting for about three years. Why? "They can be injurious to your health," he quips. But he goes to as many commission meetings as he can and tries to stay on top of the issues at hand so he can ask constructive questions.

What's the attraction of the ROMEO get-togethers? "It's such a diverse group," said Tony Waterman, who logs a lot of time on the tennis court, as do at least half of the ROMEOS, and is also an avid bridge player. He enjoys the variety of ideas these guys bring to the table.

One never knows what will come up for discussion—politics, world affairs, sports or social issues. There's only one rule: a five-minute limit on health problems. Otherwise, in an age group like this there might not be time for anything else. Fortunately, there's a physician on hand—Dr. James Dattilo—to monitor the discussion.

If there's one corporate culture that might influence these meetings, it's that of Aluminum Company of America. Lewis, Waterman and George Stanley all worked for Alcoa. But most of the group comes from a variety of businesses and professions.

If nothing else, the ROMEOS and similar groups prove one thing: retirement can be just as stimulating as the business world because the relationships you develop keep your mind sharp and your social skills intact. Besides that, it's a lot of fun! ☐