

Life is still good after a century

Champion golfer, painter enjoys health

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His health is surprisingly good. His mind is sharp and his opinions, still wise and relevant. His golf swing is phenomenal. His watercolor paintings are breathtaking. And Walter Stiegele's poker-playing skills are legendary. Not too shabby for someone who on Tuesday turned 100.

Stiegele was feted by his wife, Florence, with a surprise party in the Manor House at Sumner on Ridgewood in Copley Township. The Stiegeles reside in an independent-living compound at the senior community.

"I feel pretty good," Walter Stiegele said during a recent interview. Although he's had to use a walker over the past several weeks, "It's just a temporary setback," Stiegele said. He blames arthritis in his once-broken ankle. He anticipates being back on the golf course very soon. He's been a member of Fairlawn Country Club for 59 years.

"At the age of 97, he won the golfing gold medal in his age group at the Summit County Senior Olympics," said Sue Augustine, Sumner on Ridgewood's program coordinator. "That same year he won a first prize in a statewide senior art competition for one of his watercolors. And this year he began studying Spanish with the OASIS classes here at Sumner and he plans to enter the art competition again this year."

Florence Stiegele credits her husband's longevity to always being active and eating right. "He played baseball, football and was a speed-skater in his younger years," she said. "And he doesn't smoke or drink."

The Stiegeles have been married 13 years. Both lost their spouses the same year—he was married to Mildred for 61 years. At 83, Florence Stiegele is 17 years his junior. Even so, she insists, "I got old faster than he has." He disagrees.

Ever quick to laud her husband's accomplishments, Florence Stiegele proudly showed off walls of his paintings. "He began painting 15 years ago because he decided the time might come when he might have to give up golf," she said. "The painting would be something else for him to fall back on." Fortunately, he's still able to do both.

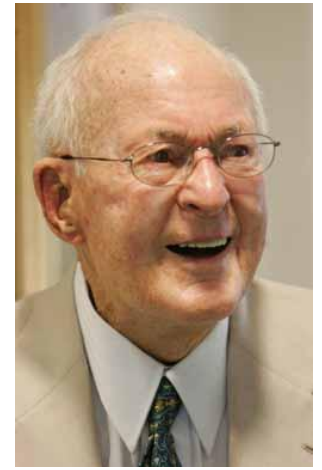
Walter Stiegele retired in 1970 with 25 years' service from Roadway Express, where he was vice president in charge of traffic. "I had only three jobs my whole life," Stiegele reminisced. His first in 1924 was with New York Central Railroad, where he worked in the tariff bureau. "Eventually, I took the civil service examination and was able to get a job in 1935 with the Interstate Commerce Commission at the time the motor carriers were put under federal regulation," he said. That job also had to do with tariffs. "My entire working career had to do with tariffs," Stiegele said, laughing. While building his career, he spent seven years going to college at night.

His penchant for learning—which also is evident in travels that took him all over the world—is ongoing.

Stiegele has two children—Walter Stiegele of Parma and Joan Norris of Akron; eight grandchildren; 13 great-grandchildren; and one great-great-grandchild. His wife has two sons, four grandchildren and five great-grandchildren.

So how does it feel to be 100? "It doesn't feel any different than 80 or 90," he said.

"He's already received a lot of birthday cards," his wife said of the just minted centenarian. "Many are the same cards," she joked. "I guess they don't make that many 100-year-old cards." And they certainly don't make many like Walter Stiegele, either.



Walter Stiegele smiles at the surprise party thrown for his 100th birthday.

Paul Tople/
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