

## Motor City Memories Emerge as Retirees Share Stories at American House II Show

If there's a friendlier car show on the east side than the one put on at the American House II senior living center in Sterling Heights, well, we just don't know which one it is.

Otherwise, American House, on Schoenherr just north of 14 Mile, hosted a big car show last Friday to entertain the residents and involve the greater community in the center's activities alike.

"I think this is our 11th year (hosting the show), said AH 2 Executive Director Renee Lotito. "We started out at the Lakeside building. Many of our residents are auto industry retirees – or at least their spouses are.

"This is a fun show for our residents because it gives them a chance to reminisce about the cars most of them drove when they were younger."

Indeed, pretty much every empty space at the AH 2 senior center was filled with a classic car, ranging from 1950s-era T-Birds to a gorgeous and glorious Cadillac ambulance that was in service from 1976-85. It was on display courtesy of MedStar, a health care transportation vendor that serve American House across the metro area.

Touring the car show site were Chrysler retirees Leonard Gasieski, 87, a visitor, and Tadeaus Zrebski, 93, a resident.

They loved seeing the old cars, especially the Chryslers, of course. Said Gasieski, "I first started out on the line at Dodge Main. Then I got moved to the cutter line, where we sharpened the tools for the entire plant.

"After the war I was at Dodge Main. Then in 1950 they built the Trenton engine plant and I worked there. Finally I retired in 1977 at the age of 52. That means I've been retired (35 years) longer than I actually worked (31 years)."

That wasn't a complaint by the way – just an observation. You don't meet many people who actually "outlive" their work years in retirement.

Then there was Zrebski, who worked at Chrysler for 27 years before retiring in 1982.

Zrebski is also a World War II U.S. Army veteran who served in Iceland, Germany, France, England and Ireland. He eventually worked as a medic for the Army and served through the end of



Hank Skoczylas / Photo by Gerald Scott



Chrysler retirees Leonard Gasieski, left, and Tadeaus Zrebski.

the big war in 1945.

Back in Detroit, he caught on with Murray Body, with Murray being a longtime car body provider similar to what Fisher Body did in its prime. Zrebski lived in Hamtramck coming out the war and through the years he worked at Warren Stamping.

So there you go, the seniors were entertained with music

from a local DJ as well as a big hot dog lunch provided for the retirees by the American House senior center. To say a good time was had by all is an understatement. Any car show that has bright sunshine, cruiser car music and tasty hot dogs, along with late-model GM, Ford and Chrysler chrome from the muscle car era, has to be a good one.

## Public Library Seeks Business Partners

Do you or someone you know own a business in Warren, and want the chance to directly reach over 440,000 people?

The Warren Public Library, along with the Suburban Library Cooperative (SLC), is currently seeking businesses interested in partnering in a National Library Card Month promotion.

Featuring more than 44 businesses last fall, the program connects library card holders from libraries in Macomb County (and Troy and Harper Woods) to local businesses.

The new promotion involves having businesses offer discounts or perks to customers who show their library card.

In return, the area's libraries publicize the program to their patrons with free lists of all participating businesses (with location and contact information), in-house advertising, library web sites and social media sites like Facebook and Twitter.

"The Warren Public Library is excited to join the program this year, after seeing the success of the program for libraries and businesses of other communities last year," said Deb Lambert, director of the Warren Public Library.

Warren businesses that are interested in signing up for this initiative should contact the Suburban Library Cooperative at 586-685-5750 or download the participation form from the cooperative website.

## Fouts Calls for Action to Keep West Nile Virus from Advancing Further

WARREN – For the second consecutive year, Warren Mayor Jim Fouts has directed various departments in the city to begin an aggressive mosquito prevention and eradication program designed to prevent and control the spread of mosquito-caused illnesses, such as West Nile Virus.

Fouts said he recently met with the directors of Engineering, DPW, Property Maintenance, Recreation and Sanitation departments to begin an aggressive program to treat areas of the city that may contain stagnant standing water, which could be conducive to mosquito larvae.

The city-wide Mosquito eradication, education and prevention program includes the following:

- 1) Property Maintenance Division inspectors will be trained by the Engineering department for the proper use of briquettes used in mosquito prevention.
- 2) Property Maintenance inspectors will be directed to identify pools or ponds of water that would be ideal breeding grounds for mosquitoes. They will also identify other potential breeding areas for mosquitoes such as dumpsters, wheelbarrows, tires, hubcaps, garden equipment, pool covers, pipes, drains, recycling

## GM Tech Center Retiree Recalls A Busy Career

by Gerald Scott

GM Tech Center retiree Henry "Hank" Skoczylas has quite a career story to tell – and he told it at the American House II Senior Center car show in Sterling Heights last week.

Skoczylas, 83, is a longtime Warren resident who now lives at the American House retirement village on Schoenherr north of 14 Mile Road in Sterling Heights.

There, he talked about his busy 20th century automotive career which included stints at the Chrysler Missile Plant in the 1950s and 1960s, F. Jos. Lamb Co. (now Lamb Technicon) in the 1970s and finally GM in the 1980s and 1990s.

Skoczylas is also a U.S. Army veteran who served in occupied West Germany following World War II. He sailed into Bremerhaven and from there was stationed with Army tank forces at Grafenwoehr, which was the German Army's panzer equivalent to Fort Knox.

He served in the Army from 1947-51 and by great coincidence, Skoczylas' platoon commander back then was none other than Gen. George S. Patton's son, George IV.

He was bivouaced in the post-war U.S. sector in 1948 during the Berlin Airlift although he never visited Berlin itself.

"I was with Army tank forces," he said. "They moved us around a lot for that entire year because they didn't want another Pearl Harbor – we were always in fear that Soviet tanks would break through to the West, so we played cat and mouse with them during that era."

Here's a coincidence – he was supposed to muster out of the Army on June 25, 1950 – the same date that North Korea invaded the South and initiated the Korean War. Immediately, Congress re-upped any active service GI and he was compelled to stay in the Army one more year, serving at both Ft. Knox and West Point, although he didn't graduate from there.

"Uncle Sam gave me my honorable discharge papers – and grabbed them back, all in the same day," he joked.

Meanwhile, back in the U.S., in 1951, he would meet his eventual wife, Dorothy Lewandowski, in a dance bar on the Detroit side of 8 Mile and Dequindre. He jokes that he discovered 8 Mile long before rapper Eminem made that movie of the same name.

Because he served in the Army during Korean wartime, he became eligible to use a portion of the GI Bill, so he studied architecture at both Cass Tech in Detroit as well as Ferris State, but

without graduating from either.

By 1957 he took a job with the then-Chrysler Missile Plant at 16 Mile and Van Dyke, which is today's Sterling Heights Assembly Plant. There, he worked on Redstone and Jupiter launch missiles for NASA.

"The Chrysler missile plant was divided into engineering and test, and I worked in test. I was a hydrostatic technician, which means we filled the rocket boosters with water and looked for hairline cracks with black lights," he recalled.

"The first time we did that, the missile imploded from the weight of the load and 100,000 gallons of water filled the plant floor three inches deep," he recalled. "There were white shirts from the Pentagon visiting that day, so in a fit of pique, Chrysler fired everybody on that shift."

"The next day, Chrysler realized that nobody else was trained to do missile work, so they hired everybody back."

Skoczylas did test work on the Redstone and Jupiter rocket boosters that launched Explorer I, America's first satellite, and Mercury Freedom 7, with Alan Shepard aboard, as our first astronaut launched into space.

In 1958, Chrysler sent him to the NASA Marshall Space Flight Center in Alabama to work with German rocket scientist Wernher von Braun on rocket theory. (Von Braun's younger brother, Magnus, was actually the Chrysler Missile program manager).

"Von Braun told an audience of us Chrysler students, 've-vill-catch-ze-Russians!' in that thick German accent of his. He was right, we did catch the Russians," he recalled. The missile plant further built the boosters that launched America's first nuclear weapons into outer space, too.

Skoczylas also worked on the Jupiter missiles stationed in Turkey that were pawns in the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis – the rockets that JFK promised the Soviets he'd remove if they pulled their missiles out of Cuba first.

Twenty years later, he got his last auto job at the Tech Center, employed there from 1983-93 as a UAW-GM mechanic working on building HVAC and plumbing across the automotive campus.

So that's Hank's story and he's sticking to it. His wife Dorothy died in 2003. He had three sons including Bobby, a Chrysler retiree, Larry, an oral surgeon and Gerry, an automotive journalist of note at the *Tech Center News*. It seems Skoczylas was actually a more important cog in the defense and auto industries than he knows or remembers.

Great stories, dad.

bins, flower pots, buckets and clogged rain gutters.

3) Citizens will be encouraged to check the above items and make sure they are emptied of standing stagnant water.

4) If inspectors identify stagnant pools and other major sources of mosquito breeding, homeowners will be notified that they must eliminate the problem or face possible fines up to \$1,000.

5) The DPW is depositing briquettes into 6,000 catch basins.

6) The Recreation Department will direct and train their employees to identify and then treat places of standing water in the

parks with "mosquito dunks," which are shaped like hockey pucks. They dissolve in water and kill the larvae.

Fouts stated that "every effort will be put forth to protect Warren residents against the dangers posed by mosquito infestation."

"This year is of particular concern because of the very dry weather followed by heavy rains that this area has encountered in the last several months."

"Since Warren is not an island, I encourage other cities in the metro area to engage in the same effort at prevention and control of mosquitoes."