

# THE GERMAN SOCIETY OF MARYLAND

Founded 1783 Incorporated by Act of the General Assembly of Maryland, Chapter 100 Feb 3, 1818

## VEREINSNACHRICHTEN

OCTOBER 2010 ISSUE #74

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### **PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE**

Re-member and Re-novate

Our editor, treasurer and past president Ted Potthast recently gave me an interesting book written in German: The History of the German Society of Pennsylvania 1764-1917, published by Oswald Seidensticker and Max Heinrici, 1917, Graf Breuninger, 1631 Germantown Ave. Philadelphia.

I found two facts of interest:

1. The oldest version of the constitution published by Christoph Saur in 1766 begins with a religious title: In Nomine Domini Jesu Christi. Amen. The seal of the society expresses the same sentiment: Religione, industria et fortitudine Germana proles florebit. (Through faith, diligence and courage the German descendants will flourish.)

2. On page 35 the book quotes the author Freiherr von Fuerstenwurther from his book The German in North America (der Deutsche in Nordamerika) about an event that happened in Baltimore in 1816: (..free Negroes bought a whole German family from a ship from Amsterdam. Upset about this fact, the German inhabitants of Baltimore collected money to redeem the family. This incident initiated the formation of the German Society. While our Society goes back to 1783, it was officially incorporated in 1817 by Act of the General Assembly of Maryland. The spontaneous benevolent response of the Baltimore Germans lead to our official incorporation.

May this be a lesson for us: Responding to a current need invigorates and energizes an organization. For me building bridges of language and culture would be such a priority. Lets have a dialogue in our Vereinsnachrichten.

Sincerely, H.J. Siegfried Otto

### **AWARDS BANQUET NOV. 13 IN ADLERSAAL: ALFRED ZELLER IS 2010 HONOREE**

As our Society celebrates its 227th year, our annual banquet will be held on Saturday, Nov. 13 in the Adlersaal at Zion Church. Invitations to all of our members will be received in a few days; please respond promptly in order to assure a seat. The ticket price is \$55 and tickets are first come, first served. Al Zeller, a well-known leader in the MD German American community will be honored.

A live band will be on hand to provide music before and after the banquet. The ticket price includes beer and wine, hors d'oeuvres and a German dinner provided by Old World Deli. Members are encouraged to come and bring family and friends. The banquet is a Society tradition which was interrupted only once, during WWII. Even if you are unable to attend, you are asked to support the event by becoming a sponsor or by placing an ad; many members honor their ancestors with an ad in the banquet program. See the forms for ads and sponsors in the invitation package.

**KALENDER**

- Oct. 2-3 Oktoberfest Frederick MD Fair Grounds
- Oct 3 Ecumenical Service (German Society, Zion Church and Society for the History of Germans)
- Oct. 16 Crabtoberfest Cambridge MD
- Oct. 28 Sauerbraten Club Night at Zion
- Nov. 11 Commemoration of Henry Gunther
- Nov. 13 German Society Annual Awards Banquet
- Nov. 27-28 Christkindlmarkt at Zion Church

Visit the German Society's website:  
[www.germansociety-md.com](http://www.germansociety-md.com)

Articles from many past newsletters are posted on our website. Dr. Maureen Helinski maintains the site.

"Pioneers in Service", the history of our Society, can now be found on our web site.

For more local German-American happenings, check the web site of the Deutschamerikanischer Bürgerverein von Maryland: [www.md-germans.org](http://www.md-germans.org)

**THREE PENNY OPERA**

In furtherance of our mission to promote the study of the German language and preserve our German American heritage, our Society provided 41 Maryland college students with free tickets to attend the musical play of the German American playwright, Kurt Weil. The play was presented in German and English: students from Oldenburg, Germany sang the songs in German and students from Towson University played spoken parts in English. Our Society contributed \$1,200 towards the reception before the event on Oct. 2, as also did the Deutschamerikanischer Buergerverein von MD. The event was entertaining and enlightening.

**OCTOBER/GERMAN FEST AT BLOB'S**

Blob's Park will host a Germanfest on October 15 from 6:00 to 11:00 to benefit SARAH'S HOUSE, an organization supportive of families who have no home. 60% of those families are homeless children. It is located at Fort Meade, MD and is a county organization partnered with the U. S. Army and Catholic Charities. Tickets are \$20 and food and beverages will be available for purchase. For tickets or information, contact Juanita Petke at [jpatke@verizon.net](mailto:jpatke@verizon.net) or call and leave a message at her home: 410-672-1909.

**CHRISTKINDLMARKT - NOV. 27-28**

The annual Christkindlmarkt sponsored by the Baltimore Kickers and Zion Church will be held on the Saturday and Sunday after Thanksgiving. at Zion. It will feature various Stollen-Lebkuchen-Advent Calendars-Domino Steine, Printen-Spekulatus-Pfeffernuesse-Mon-Cheri cookies-Marzipan-collector gifts. FOOD: Nuernberger Bratwurst on roll; Frankfurter on roll; Goulash soup; Smoked Lachs (Salmon) sandwiches; Stollen and Lebkuchen. DRINK: Gluehwein (mulled wine); German beer, coffee, tea, soda and hot chocolate. Your \$2 admission donations gets you a ticket for 3 raffle items.

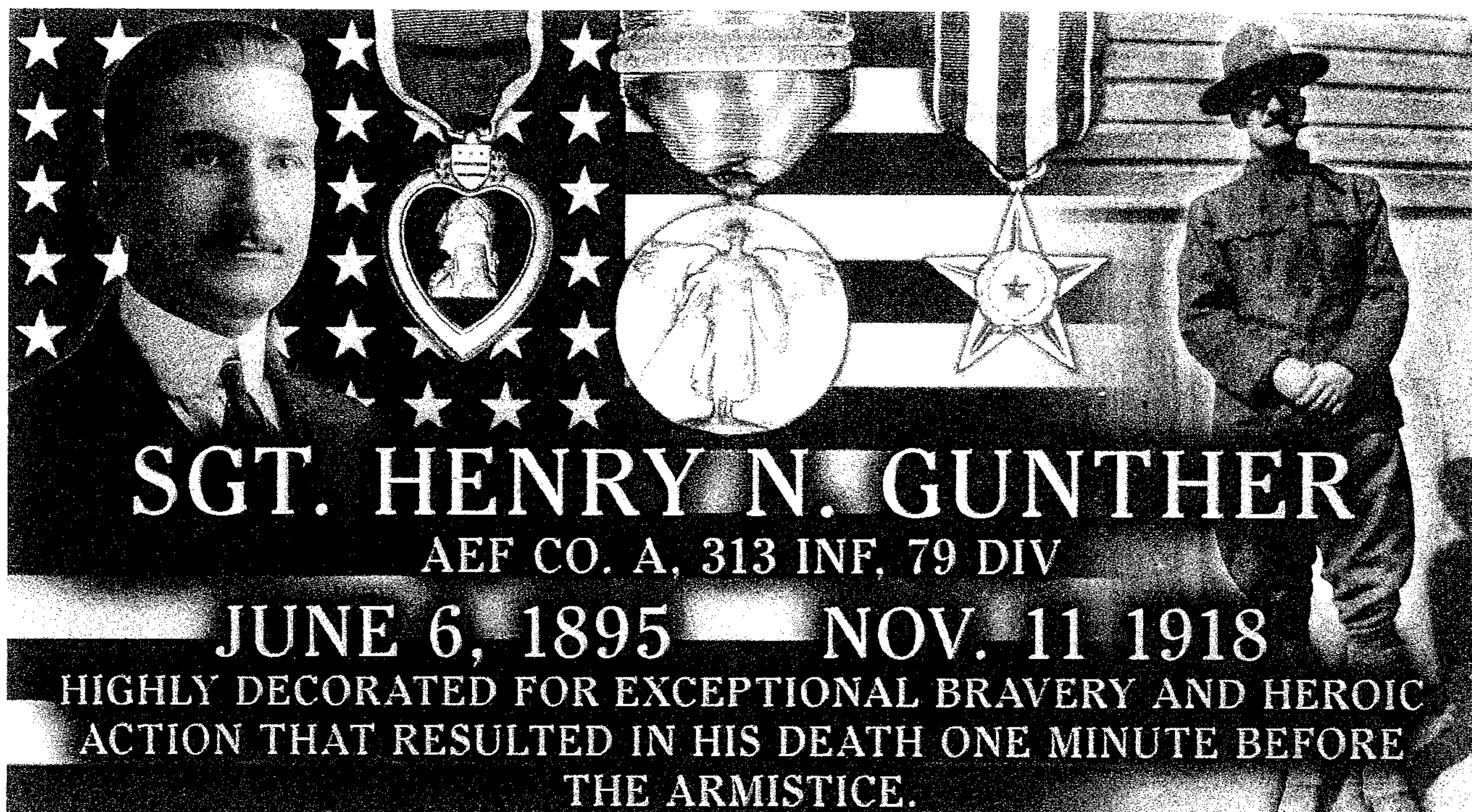
**GERMAN AMERICAN DAY**

German language students from all over Maryland will converge on McDaniel College for German American Day to join dozens of workshops where their knowledge of German language, culture and modern Germany will be enhanced. Over 1,000 students are expected. It's a bonus for the German students; they usually arrive in school buses and instead of classes, they can experience a learning process which is both rewarding and fun. Students always like a change of scenery, and it's a thrill for high schoolers to be on a college campus. The moving force behind GAD is our long time German Society Board member, Prof. Dr. Mohamed Esa. Dr. Esa has a world-wide reputation for his methodology of teaching the German language, for which he has been awarded the cross of merit by the Federal Republic of Germany. Members of our Society who are German teachers participate in GAD, as members of The American Society of Teachers of German. Our Society is privileged to work with the educators in the study of modern language. Many of those attending GAD will be the recipients of our Society's high school awards, given in May, 2011.

**TREASURER'S REPORT**

From Jan. through Sept. 23, the Society's income has been \$24,086.49 and expenses have been \$30,844.78. The major expenditures have been grants to students and colleges of \$11,000 and office rent of \$6,300. Investment income \$5,490 and dues were \$9,220.

OUR SOCIETY HONORS MEMORY OF HENRY N. GUNTHER,  
GERMAN MARYLANDER AND WORLD WAR ONE HERO



Plaque to be dedicated Nov. 11, 2010 at Holy Redeemer Cemetery, Baltimore, Maryland

Henry Nicholas Gunther lived in Baltimore, Maryland, on Eastern Avenue opposite Patterson Park. He was the last American soldier who died in World War I, on Nov. 11, 1919 a few minutes before 11 a.m., when the war came to an end under the terms of the armistice. His memory will be honored by the dedication of a plaque at his grave.

When we learned that Henry Gunther's grave had no marker in his memory, our Society approached the cemetery officials. Its director of operations, Thomas DiCiurcio, designed and commissioned the plaque shown above at the expense of the cemetery.

Presently several other organizations have joined as co-sponsors or participants in the dedication on Nov. 11th: American Legion; Veterans of Foreign Wars; Deutschamerikanischer Buergerverein von MD; Arion Gesangverein; Maryland National Guard, Catholic War Veterans, the Veterans Administration and other groups.

**"...TO PRESERVE AND PROMOTE THE GERMAN HERITAGE..."**

Thus reads part of our mission statement. It goes on to refer to the German American community. For well over 100 years, our Society has stressed that it is a German American organization, and we are foremost American.

We are now engaged in a project to dedicate a plaque marking the grave of a fellow German American whose heroism in battle is a part of the heritage which we are committed to preserve. In doing so we are carrying out our stated mission.

Our members can show their commitment to our mission and that they take it seriously by coming to the dedication of the Gunther plaque. The date is a legal holiday, Veterans Day and a day when most veterans organizations are already tied to other events. Thus it is important that members of the German Society turn out for the event. It is the first time in living memory when we have asked our members to actually do something patriotic and in furtherance of our mission. It is therefore hoped that you will mark your calendar and come to the cemetery for one hour on that morning.

## A MEMORABLE INVOCATION

We print here for the edification of our members, the invocation presented by Zion's Pastor Dr. Holger Roggelin at the annual meeting of The Society for the History of the Germans in Maryland.

*ALMIGHTY GOD, you have given us this good land for our heritage. We give you thanks for bringing our ancestors or us over here from the old country into a new one, full of hope and promise, and we are grateful for the rich history those before us have entrusted to us today to preserve and to hand down to generations still to come.*

*Let us be a people mindful of your favor and glad to do your will. Bless our land with honest industry, sound learning and an honorable way of life. Save us from violence, discord and confusion; from pride and arrogance, and from every evil course of action.*

*Defend our liberties, and fashion into one united people the multitudes brought here out of many nations. Endue with the spirit of wisdom those whom we have entrusted with the authority of government, that there may be justice and peace at home, in our city, in our country, and throughout the world. In time of prosperity, fill our hearts with thankfulness and in time of trouble, let not our trust in you fail. Be present at our gathering tonight and bless us and our food. Komm, Herr Jesu, sei unser Gast und segne, was du uns bescheret hast.*

## SOUR BEEF NIGHT OCT. 28

The congregation of Zion Church is one of a handful of sponsors of church dinners, and their specialty is sauerbraten. October 28 at 7 pm is set for "Club Night" at which the German clubs of Maryland get special treatment...a ticket for one free drink, for the price of \$13.50. Tickets must be paid for in advance. If you wish to be seated at the German Society's table, please mail your check, payable to "Zion Church" to Bärbel Otto, our office manager, at 3 Haddon Court, Baltimore, MD 21212.

## PICNIC COMMITTEE FORMING

Now is the time to get started on our 2011 German Society Annual Picnic. We are forming the picnic

committee and are looking for committee members. This year it was held at the end of June, but we had a conflict: the Baltimore Kickers held their picnic the very next day. We're hoping to avoid conflicts next year. If you like the idea of a "Great German Picnic" and want to help make it a success, please join the committee. To talk about it, call Ted Potthast at 410-828-8137.

## GERMAN SOCIETY OF MARYLAND

Many members of our Society are retired or close to it, so they were discouraged by the recent Barrington study that shows Maryland as the 5th worse place in the country to retire. The factors considered were crime, climate, life expectancy, taxes and cost of living. Taxes and cost of living are 25% above the national average. But money isn't everything and people consider other values. Baltimore is said to be the best place to be if you get sick; Baltimoreans are within 15 minutes of 25 hospitals, including world class Johns Hopkins. Family and friends are more important than money. Proximity to culture, and activities rank high. Our members have another motivation: belonging to the German Society of Maryland makes you special; the fellowship of other members and the common interests in our heritage and culture.

## BOARD TO CONSIDER FUND RAISER FOR SENDING STUDENTS TO GERMANY

The Executive Committee has recommended that the Board consider a program to fund a student to study in Germany for one year after graduating from high school. This follows up on a proposal by Louis Grasmick, who donated \$2,000 as seed money for advertising a fund-raiser for a German Society project which would honor his friend, The Rev. H. J. Siegfried Otto. President Otto, who as a youth came to America where he graduated from high school in rural New York, revealed that his dream was to send American students to study in Germany so they could return with German language skills and a desire to perpetuate a good relationship between the United States and Germany. The Executive Committee also considered that there are few students planning to be teachers of German and such a program may encourage young people to consider such a teaching career. Mr. Grasmick presented the idea of raising a fund, the income from which would pay for the program.

# AN INTERVIEW WITH ALFRED ZELLER 2010 HONOREE

## “I WAS KIDNAPPED”

Our editor, Ted Potthast, spoke at length to Mr. Zeller so our members might know his life's story, and why he is so well loved in the Baltimore German American community.

**QUESTION:** What made you decide to leave Germany and come to Baltimore?

**ANSWER:** I WAS KIDNAPPED. My wife's mother a childhood friend of my mother... She came to America in 1928. After the war, in 1946, she resumed corresponding with my mother; she was living in Baltimore and had a 15 year old daughter who could speak German but wanted to learn to write and asked if her daughter could write to me. She and I corresponded: she wrote in German and I corrected her letters and returned them. Six years later she wrote me that her mother was coming to Germany to visit my mother. I suggested that she come too. By then she was 21 and I was 27 and it was love at first sight. She asked me to come to America. We went to the American consul in Stuttgart and he told us it would take at least 3 years for me to get a visa. We were downcast and as we were leaving, the consul said: it would be much quicker if you were married. Two weeks later we were married. She had to leave and go home, but in three months I had my visa. Still it was hard to get passage on a boat to America. One day my travel agent called and said he had a spot for me on a boat leaving from Genoa, Italy so I hurried down and got aboard. The boat was full of refugees. We picked up more refugees in Barcelona and Gibraltar, and dropped some off in Halifax.

The weather was terrible; I became so seasick that I said to myself: Alfred, Alfred, what have you done? You're going to die.

It took us 18 days to get to New York where my wife and her mother met me and brought me to Baltimore. I had married an American and was a male “war bride”.

**QUESTION:** What were you doing during the war?

**ANSWER.** I was born in 1924 and was drafted into the German army in 1942. I was sent right to Russia and was fighting near Smolensk when I was shot in the arm; I could still walk so I was put back into battle, but the next day was hit in both legs by shrapnel, and since I couldn't walk they sent me home to recover. As soon as I could walk they sent me to Hungary to fight the Russians and I was wounded again, this time in the arm. Again I was sent home for recovery, but this time my arm stiffened and I could only use one arm. I was sent to Czechoslovakia but since I was too disabled to fight, they sent me back to Germany and to “Sergeant School”. In a very short time I was sent to fight again, this time down to Lake Constance where the French were advancing. As the French approached, I hid in a cellar. Eventually I was captured and sent to a French POW camp where I was kept for a year. When the war was over, since I was still wounded, they sent me home in 1946. I still have the shrapnel in my legs and my arm is still stiffened; lately the shrapnel has started causing me some pain.

**QUESTION:** You're a well known accordion player. How did you learn to play the accordion?

**ANSWER:** In my village everyone was poor. There was no TV then, and no one could afford to buy a radio, so we had to make our own entertainment. Everybody could play some musical instrument. When I was about 9 years old I watched my uncles and other relatives playing the accordion and learned from them. I could not read music

and still can't. When the war was over and we were occupied by the American army, I would play in bars and taverns, for fun, not for pay. One day an American sergeant came to our German bar and heard me, so he asked me to come and play at a bar where the American soldiers hung out. I did. The Americans liked me and I learned a lot of American songs. A sergeant from Texas came with his jeep to my house every day to pick me up; I would get free beer, cigarettes and food and I became friends with the Americans. When I was a soldier, I never fought the Americans, only the Russians. But when I went into the German army, my mother told me to be good even to the enemy: even they have mothers, she said, and I always heeded her advice.

**QUESTION:** How did you make a living?

**ANSWER:** After the war I learned to be a machinist; there was always a demand for machinists and I always had a job. When I came to Baltimore, it was also easy to get a job as a machinist. I went to school at night to learn English, but I was then 27 years old and it was hard.. My wife's mother had a brother who was the caretaker for the retirement home at Notchcliffe for the School Sisters of Notre Dame, who had come from Germany. Through him my mother-in-law knew a German nun who was helpful. My wife had a girlfriend whose father worked at a company called P & H, a die maker and he got me a job. I worked there until I met a bunch of Germans who were working at American Standard; they urged me to come and work with them. I worked for American Standard for 25 years. General Motors bought the American Standard plant and they wanted me to move to a different city, but my wife did not want to leave. Baltimore.

A machinist had no trouble getting a job and I went for a while with Crown, Cork and Seal. Some German friends who were working at the Oles Envelope company persuaded me to come and work there, since all of their equipment was made in Germany. I thought I would work there for 4 years and then retire, but after 3 years my supervisor died and they made me supervisor. I

stayed at Oles for 15 years.

**QUESTION:** You were an accomplished athlete..... What about your athletic career?"

**ANSWER:** In Germany I used to play what we called "fussball", here we call it soccer. I played for various teams and was playing for the Baltimore Rockets in the American Soccer League, which allowed me to travel to places such as New York and other large cities. We were playing an exhibition game against the swiss national team in the old Baltimore Memorial Stadium; its coach was from my old home town in Germany and I knew him. At half time a bunch of German guys came to me and asked me to play with their team, the Baltimore Kickers. I finished the season with the Rockets and went with the Kickers the next year, in 1955..

**QUESTION:** You had a band called "The Happy Wanderers". How did that come about?

**ANSWER:** The Baltimore Kickers had no money, so we decided to have a fund-raiser, a dance. But we could not afford a band, So four of us decided we would be the band. I played the accordion, and we had two guitars and a drummer. People liked us. and another club asked us to play. The Geselligkeit club invited us to play at the Deutsches Haus where Paul Ludtke heard us; he then had the German Radio Hour, and he became our promoter. He arranged bookings for us. and got us publicity. Paul gave us the name "The Happy Wanderers". A group of clubs put together the Oktoberfest at the 5th Regiment Armory and we played there. Mr. Von Paris heard us and asked us to play at his daughter's wedding held at his farm. Mr. Von Paris then sponsored us and arranged for us to make two records. I am still a good friend of the Von Paris family.

**QUESTION:** Did the band play outside Maryland?

**ANSWER:** We played from North Carolina up to New York at German events. Once we played in Washington for a group of former soldiers who

had been stationed in Germany. They were all black; we were the only white people in the hall. We had a good time with them. They greeted us well and they all had good things to say about Germany.

**QUESTION:** When did the Happy Wanderers cease to play?

**ANSWER:** In 1980. Two things happened. I became the supervisor at Oles Envelope Co. and could not travel any more; I had to be on call in case any equipment broke down. And my wife had a stroke. My mother-in-law and I took care of her and after my mother in law died, I found a housekeeper. My wife was bedridden for 22 years until she died in 2002.. Our housekeeper still takes care of me and my son, Edward who also lives with me. After my wife died I took up the accordion again as a hobby and began playing at many events, such as the Mayfest at Zion Church and other places. I played every Thursdays at lunch at the Edelweiss Bakery on Belair Road until the owner died. Frank Hobbs went to the Eichenkranz Restaurant in Highlandtown and arranged for me to play at lunch two Thursday a month. (Note: Frank Hobbs said the Al plays non-stop for two hours and doesn't eat; he takes his lunch home with him.)

**QUESTION:** Tell me about your wife's family.

**ANSWER:** My mother-in-law's name was Bazhmeir. She married a man from Saxony named Haupt and that was my wife's maiden name. My wife's uncle was named Bazhmeir and was the caretaker at Notchcliffe.

**QUESTION:** How did you make friends in America?

**ANSWER:** I like people and have always had many friends. The American soldiers after the war made me their friend. My music and my soccer made me lots of friends and the music still does. I like to make people happy.

**QUESTION:** What about your old friends?

**ANSWER:** I will be 88 on my next birthday. Most of the men from my soccer days are gone and only one from my band is still living. I have to walk with a cane. Sometimes I feel pain in my left leg from the shrapnel from the war. For the past year I have been going to receive dialysis three times per week.

**QUESTION:** You have worked with most of the German clubs in this area. Do you have any advice for them?

**ANSWER:** Many years ago I saw a problem: that the members of each club think that "my club is better than the other club". I have always tried to bring them together, but have not had much success. They need to cooperate and work along with one another.

**QUESTION:** What do your friends call you?

**ANSWER:** My American friends call me Al or Alf. My German friends call me Alfred.

**QUESTION:** Any special memories?

**ANSWER:** Governor Schaefer told me the Happy Wanderers was his favorite band. I enjoyed walking in a parade down Fallsway in my lederhosen with Hyman Pressman, having a good time. I recall an event at the Statler Hotel in New York: we were told we could not play there unless we belonged to a union. One of the band members replied: we're German we belong to the Dortmunder Union (the name of a German beer). They let us play. Another time a lady asked me why my stockings were so short. I told her that we were so poor that my mother could not afford to buy enough wool to knit them any higher. I also recall that when I left Germany, we had no large stores like they have today; our village had only one butcher.

