

Thomas A. Werner, a retired insurance executive who was active in several German-American cultural and social organizations, died of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease Aug. 22 at his home in the Riderwood Thornleigh neighborhood. He was 80.

Shelley Arnold had known Mr. Werner since her days in the insurance business.

“Tom was just a good all-around guy and a great person,” said Ms. Arnold, who edits the German Society of Maryland Inc. newsletter. “He had a matter-of-fact manner and you always knew where you stood with him. He answered questions with one-sentence answers and that’s the way it was. He was a very honest man.”

Bernard A. Penner was both a friend of Mr. Werner’s and active in the same German societies.

“He was a very steady guy in the German community. When he said he’d show up, he showed up, and he handled his various offices with competence and detail,” recalled Mr. Penner.

Thomas Alfred Werner, son of Alfred J. Werner, an insurance executive, and his then-wife, Mercedes Will, a homemaker, was born in Baltimore and at an early age moved to Westport, Connecticut, with his mother, who had married William A. Ketchum.

After graduating in 1959 from Staples High School in Westport, he attended the University of Maryland briefly, before enlisting in 1960 in the Air Force where he was trained in repairing fighter jet electronics at Paine Air Force Base in Everett, Washington.

“A veteran of the Cuban missile crisis, he had vivid memories of loading nuclear weapons onto the planes knowing the world was on the brink of disaster,” according to a biographical profile submitted by his family.

Discharged from the Air Force in 1964, Mr. Werner returned to Baltimore and became a trained underwriter for the Insurance Company of North America, while attending evening classes at the University of Maryland on the G.I. Bill. After working as an underwriter for five years, he joined his father's independent agency, the Werner Insurance Agency, and after it was sold, he established his own agency in Towson in 1984, Werner Agency Ltd., of which he was president. It specialized in high-risk insurance that resulted in forming a professional relationship with underwriters at Lloyd's of London.

Mr. Werner retired in 2006.

He was a lifelong lover of the outdoors and physical activity, and as a Boy Scout in Connecticut, he earned the Order of the Arrow, which is granted only after a scout passes what's known as "The Ordeal," where he was involved in near-solo camping, given only minimal food and was required to maintain silence for three days while performing camp service projects.

The result of this experience developed into a lifelong interest in Native American history and folklore.

Family members said he passed along his love of hiking, camping, canoeing and skiing to his three children, and when his son joined Boy Scout Troop 341 in Towson, it renewed his interest in scouting. He served on the troop committee as treasurer and assisted in troop activities and outings.

A life-changing event occurred in 1988 when Mr. Werner traveled to Augsburg, Germany, to meet his first grandchild and ski the Swiss and Austrian Alps. Unable to speak German and relying on his son, he was determined to learn the language.

Later that year, he took German language classes at the Baltimore Kickers, a soccer club that was founded in 1953, and in addition to soccer, also promotes German culture and language.

"He learned a smattering of German, an appreciation of German beer and the meaning of *gemutlichkeit*," according to the biographical profile, referring to the German word for friendliness.

Being a Kicker member led Mr. Werner to travel to Germany with the team, and he worked at the Kickers' bratwurst and beer stand at the Maryland German Festival, where he was in charge of handling the money.

His expanded role including serving on the organization's board, mainly in a financial capacity, and for his work, he was made an honorary lifetime member of the Baltimore Kickers.

From 2006 to 2010, he served as president of the Deutschamerikanischer Burgereverein von Maryland Inc., which is the umbrella organization for area German clubs and sponsor of the annual Maryland German Festival that for years was held at Carroll Park in Southwest Baltimore.

In his first year as president, Mr. Werner moved the festival from its former home to the Maryland State Fairgrounds in Timonium, which offered a larger venue and more convenient parking, and during his tenure as president had been responsible for overseeing four festivals.

After leaving office, he continued to serve as vice president, treasurer and director, and was still holding Zoom meetings this spring and summer for the festival that was held in early July.

Mr. Werner had also held two terms as president of Club Fidelitas Inc., a Baltimore German cultural organization, and the German Society of Maryland Inc., which honored him in 2018 with their Distinguished Service Award. He was also a member of the Edelweiss Club and the society of the History of Germans in Maryland.

"Tom certainly left his footprint in the German community," Ms. Arnold said. Dottie Kirchner, former president of the Deutschamerikanischer Burgereverein, knew and worked with Mr. Werner for more than 35 years.

"Tom never shirked from anything they asked him to do. When we moved from Carroll Park to Timonium, he handled all the contracts and made sure everything was set up the right way. He was a no-nonsense person when it came to doing that. It was a big miss when he decided to retire for health

reasons. He could no longer be outside in the heat and we said, ‘Sit inside and we’ll bring you our questions and problems’. He was always a soothing source.” “Once he got his brain around a concept that he thought was important, he stuck with it. He fit right into that milieu,” Mr. Penner said. “Another side to Tom was his interest in medieval German history. He was a constant in the German community and he’s going to be missed.”

Because of his work, Mr. Werner was invited to attend German Embassy functions in Washington, D.C., including being present to hear German Chancellor Angela Merkel speak on the South Lawn of the White House in 2011. When Gov. Martin O’Malley signed the bill in 2013 making October German American Heritage Month in Maryland, Mr. Werner was in attendance.

“Our dad was cremated and we’re going to spread his ashes on the Appalachian Trail,” said a daughter, Jamie Walter of Easton.

Plans for a celebration-of-life gathering are incomplete.

In addition to his daughter, Mr. Werner is survived by his life partner of 38 years, Kay Schneck of Thornleigh; a son, Alfred Thomas Werner of Valley Forge, Pennsylvania; another daughter, Wendi Alexi Werner of Everett, Washington; two sisters, Joan Clark of Timonium and Beverly Ketchum of Florida; and five grandchildren. A marriage to the former Lynn Sibley ended in divorce.

Frederick N. Rasmussen (Baltimore Sun)