

Peace pride



Photo courtesy of June Kirk

Interfaith Peace Project founder Father Tom Bonacci, left, and Advisory Board member Walter Ruehlig stand proudly by the Peace Pole at City Hall in Antioch following the site's recently completed dedication plaque and gardening. The pole was installed Sept. 21, the U.N.-sponsored International Day of Peace. Inscribed with the words "May peace prevail on earth" in 12 languages common to our area, the pole is similar to poles planted at the base of Mt. Everest, the magnetic North Pole, Hiroshima and the Great Pyramids at Gaza.

Heroes honored

On April 9, 1942, 76,000 Filipino and American soldiers surrendered to Japanese forces and were forced to walk 80 miles to a prison camp in Capas, Tarlac. The Filipino-American Association of Pittsburg recently commemorated the 70th anniversary of the Fall of Bataan, honoring the heroes of the Bataan Death March. In the front row, from left, are survivors David U. Tejada, 89; George E. Cawley, 93; and Ramon B. Regalado, 95. In the back row are Antioch Unified School District Trustee Walter Ruehlig and Contra Costa County Board of Education Trustee Cynthia Ruehlig.

Photo courtesy of Walter Ruehlig



A son's fond memories of his immigrant father

OPPORTUNITY KNOCKS once. Horst Ruehlig, my dad, wasn't about to let the knock of the American dream go unanswered. A German citizen cook working on the Franklin Delano Roosevelt steamer, he was, between trans-Atlantic journeys, docked Oct. 17, 1938, in the virtual shadows of the Statue of Liberty.

Sensing Adolph Hitler's diabolic designs, Horst requested onshore leave to sharpen his personal cutlery. Cut asunder from the Old world, he melted into Yorkville, N.Y.'s teeming Germantown; he and his knives never to return to the Fatherland.

Horst had visions of liberty and of a ravishing brunette, Marie Koenig, whom he had met on a previous sailing and since corresponded with. He eagerly rendezvoused with Marie, a kindred German immigrant. Soon betrothed, they raised three boys, Eric,

WALTER RUEHLIG
Guest Columnist

Richard and this correspondent, Walter.

Horst rose through the culinary ranks, becoming head chef at Great Neck's prestigious Peter Luger Steakhouse and the executive chef running the corporate and employee cafeterias at the Royal Globe Insurance Company skyscraper on Wall Street. In doing so, Horst had fulfilled the immigrant dream, moving from the tenements of the city to the Long Island suburbs. Granted, there were sacrifices to be had living in a Great Neck community ranked in the top 10 school districts nationally. Horst rose every morning at 4 a.m., grabbing the chef's hat and orange juice freshly pressed and squeezed the night before and then dashing for the 4:32 bus to the Flushing subway line. On the weekends, he worked at

a Manhasset country club.

Dad missed one day of work in 22 years at Royal Globe. That day, stumbling on the bus steps, he was so weak with fever the bus driver actually had to admonish him to go home. I'm proud that Dad also takes credit for besting the advent of Rachael Raye, Martha Stewart and Eminem as TV cooks. He was on the tube in its infancy, when sets were still enclosed in mahogany cabinets, aired three channels, and timed out with a visual countdown before midnight.

Not bad for a lad whose life voyage suffered rough currents from the start. My dad had lost both parents in World War I and was treated like a male Cinderella by his aunt. Though a deserving student, without funds he reluctantly went to trade school. More trials followed as his first wife died of cancer at 43 and his middle son was hospitalized with emotional illness.

A complaint never passed Dad's lips, though. He was an innate stoic, a gentleman's gentleman and an inveterate wit. Decent to the bone, he defied the times by sitting next to his black dishwasher in the staff eating area. Dad saw a man, not a race; a soul, not a skin.

If I had one life regret, it's that my father passed away in 1983, six years before my marriage. He would have adored his grandkids but I was a confirmed bachelor until 43. Yet, the bigger they are the harder they fall. I've since become a father, step-father, five-time foster father and two-time grandfather.

My prayer for all of you this Father's Day — and I hope your prayer for me — is that we all honor our father. I hope the apple doesn't fall far from the tree.

Walter Ruehlig is a longtime Antioch resident and president of the Antioch Unified School District board of trustees.

New chief, familiar face



Photo courtesy of Walter Ruehlig

Antioch Unified School District Trustee Walter Ruehlig Trustee, left, and district Superintendent Don Gill, center, congratulate newly elected State Superintendent of Public Instruction Tom Torlakson at his inaugural celebration at Mt. Diablo High School in Concord last month. The new school chief, an Antioch resident, is a former high school science teacher and track coach who has served on the Antioch City Council, Contra Costa Board of Supervisors, state Assembly and state Senate.