



Villa Grove News

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Pages 8

Side Tracks

your express route to upcoming VG events

WE HAVE NEW EMAIL ADDRESSES!
 news@thevillagrovenews.com to submit your news related items and advertising@thevillagrovenews.com for all of your advertising needs!

6/5 VG Planning and Zoning Meeting @6pm

6/8 Fishing Tournament @ 10:00 John Leon Park

6/10-6/14 ROAR VBS @ Victory Church 9am-11:45

6/10 Camargo Council Meeting @7pm

6/10 VG City Council Meeting 6pm

6/11 Camargo Township District Library Summer Reading Program from 10-11:30

6/16 Fathers Day

6/18 Camargo Township District Library Summer Reading Program from 10-11:30

6/21 VG Clean Up Days 12pm-6pm

6/22 VG Clean Up Days 8am-5pm

6/25 Camargo Township District Library Summer Reading Program from 10-11:30

6/29 Tolono Fun Days Festival 5 PM - 9 PM City Park Tolono

7/16 - 7/20 Mattoon Bagelfest @ Mattoon Peterson Park

7/19 - 7/27 Champaign County Fair

If you have an upcoming event that you would like to see featured in Sidetracks, email us at news@thevillagrovenews.com or call us at 832-4201

Lions Club Celebrates 70 Years in Villa Grove

By Amy Rose, Staff Writer

The Villa Grove Lions Club was founded in 1949, according to long time member Howard Osborne, therefore this year will mark 70 years of service to the community.

Club treasurer Mike Leon says there are currently 22 members in the group. They meet on the first and third Tuesdays of each month. The meetings are held at 6:00 pm in the Monical's meeting room. Board members sometimes meet prior to the regular meeting at 5:30. Meetings generally consist of discussion of the club business and they may occasionally have a featured speaker address the group.

On the Lions Club International website, it lists five major areas of service that the group focuses on.

- We serve to reduce the prevalence of diabetes and improve quality of life for those diagnosed.
- We serve to prevent avoidable blindness and



Lions Club members serve pork chop dinners in 2007.

improve quality of life for people who are blind and visually impaired.

- We serve to ensure all community members have access to nutritious food.

- We serve to sustainably protect and restore our environment to improve the well-being of all communities.

- We serve to help those affected by childhood cancer survive and thrive.

The local Villa Grove chap-

ter organizes fundraisers to help fund their efforts in these areas of service. Their largest fundraising effort is an annual pork chop dinner and raffle held in April. People in Villa Grove look forward to this fantastic meal every year. This year was the 29th annual dinner and raffle. To change it up a little bit, the club decided to not offer their traditional riding lawn mower as the raffle prize, instead the grand

VGHS Hall of Fame Welcomes Two New Inductees

By Amy Rose, Staff Writer

The Villa Grove Alumni Association inducted two new members into the VGHS Alumni Hall of Fame at the annual alumni banquet on May 25. Former high school teacher, Ruth Conn and local optometrist, Dr. Steve Leon were honored for their accomplishments at Villa Grove High School, their professional success and their dedicated service to the Villa Grove community. Congratulations to Mrs. Conn and Dr. Leon!

Ruth Conn

As told to Margaret Herrmann

Ruth (Hathaway) Conn was born on July 13, 1921 and graduated from Hutsonville (Ill.) High School in 1939. She received a B.S. in Education (with honors) from Eastern Illinois College in 1943. "My mother passed away second semester of my sophomore year and I had to drop out to care for my father, but with the help of family (brother and sisters), I returned to Eastern in the fall of 1941. I worked in the Dean's Office on Saturdays for three hours and took extra classes to make-up for time lost and graduated in 1943 with honors. I received notice of a position at Villa Grove and when interviewed was hired that day as the business teacher. Five women teachers had resigned due to WWII," Mrs. Conn said.

She began teaching at Villa Grove High School, as Miss Hathaway, in 1943. She taught Business Education classes, such as typing, shorthand and bookkeeping. She also sponsored the yearbook, scholastic bowl, and prom. When not teaching because of having children, she filled in for 1 1/2 years as the elementary school secretary. After six years, she returned to teaching, not only teaching business classes, but also government classes which she really enjoyed.

She married James B. "Jake" Conn, a VGHS graduate, in June of 1949. Mrs. Conn said, "I didn't know my future husband, until he came home from WWII after he had served four years in the South Pacific. He was in the Philippines and ready to invade Japan when they dropped the bombs on Japan and the war ended. He returned to his hometown, Villa Grove, where he had been employed in the post office after he graduated in 1936 from Villa Grove High School. The bombing of Pearl Harbor led him to immediately join the Army. Jake returned to the post office and

all the men returning from service became acquainted with the new teachers. Jake and I began dating in 1946-47 and we decided to marry in June of 1949." The couple had three children: Teresa-deceased (Butch) Peuvion of Palatine, IL., Beth (Russ) Ramsey of Rochester, IL., and Jim (Sue) Conn of Lakewood, IL., all of which graduated from VGHS as well. They have blessed Ruth with nine grandchildren and nine great-grandchildren.

Mrs. Conn retired in 1983, following her husband's death, but continued to substitute teach and tutor reading students for many years at Villa Grove Schools.

She joined the Villa Grove United Methodist Church in 1949, where she served on many committees and taught Sunday School. She held many offices with the United Methodist Women and represented Villa Grove United Methodist Church at the annual conference in Macomb, IL for four years.

Mrs. Conn also served on the cancer board and visited nursing homes in three counties. She also helped transport Villa Grove residents to the election polls to vote. As an advocate, she visited the state capital to encourage legislators to pass various bills.

She was a member of the National Education Association and the Illinois Education Association. She was an active member of the Douglas County Retired Teachers Association and served as their president from 1998-1999. Conn was named the Retired Teacher of the Year in 2011.

Mrs. Conn was inducted into the Villa Grove Alumni Hall of Fame on May 25, 2019 as a beloved educator, respected co-worker and a dedicated member of the community. Ruth continues to be interested in the happenings in Villa Grove and enjoys receiving notes and calls. She now resides at: Chatham Villas of South Park # 22, 10000 S. Main Street, Chatham, IL 62629

Steve A. Leon

Steve A. Leon, born November 25, 1951, 2nd son born to Dr. John and Helen Leon.

Villa Grove High School graduating class of 1969. His introduction to Optometry started while watching his father, Dr. John A. Leon (optometrist and former mayor of Villa Grove) help his patients see better, but Steve had other formidable experiences, such as working for a carpenter during the summers. Hammering nails and cutting wood gave him time to think about his dreams and aspi-

rations. He also worked for Paul's Machine and Welding, which helped him rule out welding and crane operation as his calling in life. All of these experiences, however, helped build his work ethic and ultimately led him to what would become his calling and passion: Optometry.

He attended Western Illinois University in Macomb, Illinois where he completed his undergraduate work and received a B.S. degree in Biology Education with a minor in Health. He then attended Illinois College of Optometry, in Chicago, Illinois where he received his Doctor of Optometry degree in 1980. He returned to his hometown of Villa Grove, now as Dr. Steve A. Leon, and joined his father's optometry practice. Throughout his 39 years of practice, Steve has cared for the eyes of Villa Grove and, along with his father, has offered pro bono services to those in the community who could not otherwise afford eye care. Steve, Doc Leon (his father), and Steve's late sister Cindy (she was the office manager of the clinic), all worked together until Dr. John's retirement and Cindy's death, both in 2002. Steve continues to practice, though now (since 2012) under the name Chittick Family Eye Care. While the name may have changed, the quality of hometown care continues. The motto he coined for Chittick encompasses his philosophy: "Our Eyes are the window to our soul, life is beautiful, see it clearly". He has been recognized professionally with prestigious distinctions such as:

Recipient of the Lawrence P. Feigenbaum, Clinical Optometry Memorial Award for top clinician of his graduating class

Distinguished Alumnus Award Illinois College of Optometry 2009

Leadership Circle member Illinois College of Optometry Past President of East Central Illinois Optometric Society

Past Trustee Illinois Optometric Association

Past Secretary-Treasurer Illinois Optometric Association (2 terms)

Past President Illinois Optometric Association

Beyond caring for the 5,200 eyes (generally speaking) of Villa Grove, his devotion to his hometown community runs deep in his soul. He has served as:

Past Board member of VGHS Alumni Association

Past President of Villa Grove Lion's Club (member 39 years)

prize was \$2,500 in cash. A second fundraiser is a drive-thru pork chop dinner offered in late August. A raffle is not included in this event.

Leon notes that 100% of the proceeds from the fundraisers are used to fund the Lions Club service projects. None of the money is used on the club or it's members.

Projects funded by the Lions Club include donations to the Villa Grove school supplies project in the fall, Operation Gift that provides Christmas gifts to families in the VG school district and a donation to the VGHS FFA chapter which assists the club with serving the pork chop dinners. The Lions Club was able to help FFA members attend their convention in Washington, DC this year. They also offer a Lions Club Scholarship to a deserving VGHS graduate each year.

In the community, the Lions Club offers assistance to children and adults in need of glasses through the Chittick Family Eye Clinic. They

also collect used glasses at a drop-off box located at Rick's Country Market. They are proud to Adopt-a-Camper to attend Camp Lion for blind and deaf individuals.

They also donate to the rural food bank to fulfill their pledge to provide nutritious food to community members.

Men or women interested in joining the Lions Club are encouraged to contact a member or attend any meeting to find out more. The organization also has an information booth at Ag Days to answer any questions and you can visit their Facebook page also. Members are expected to participate in as many club activities as possible. Leon, a member for 25 years, said, "By joining the Villa Grove Lions Club you would enjoy the comradery of fellow Lions Club members while supporting numerous programs for people who would appreciate assistance in the Villa Grove area".



Ruth Conn

Past board member of The Reading Group

Past President Villa Grove Chamber of Commerce

Past President Villa Grove Jaycees

He is the current Vice President of Honor The Chief Society and member of the Illinois Patriot Guard Riders

Let us not forget high school appointments, such as co-captain of the football team his senior year, VP of the Letterman's Club his senior year, and perhaps the most important: Senior Homecoming King. Go Blue Devils!

Steve is as devoted to his country as he is to Villa Grove. In October 1996, after being in practice for 16 years, he began his military career in the Illinois Air National Guard. Lt Col Leon is currently the commander and optometrist for the 182d Medical Group in Peoria, Illinois. His responsibilities are multifaceted in that as commander, he is responsible for leading the men and women of the Medical Group, which is comprised of both GMU and DET 1 members. As the Medical Group optometrist, he ensures the members of the 182d Airlift Wing are visually ready by supporting those airmen who are in need of aircrew glasses, gas mask inserts and ballistic eyewear.

He was an integral part in 2 Humanitarian deployments to Honduras and Paraguay, where he served as the only optometrist, putting together a staff of technicians seeing hundreds of villagers and providing them with glasses. He was part of the Chemical-Biological-Nuclear-Explosives (CERFP) team during his infancy with the 182d Medical Group and was involved with CERFP deployments. ASSIGNMENTS (Military) 1996 Officer In Charge of Optometry Clinic, 182d Medical Group

1999 Deployed to Honduras for Humanitarian Mission

2002 Deployed to Paraguay for Humanitarian Mission

2006 Chemical-Biological-Radiological-Nuclear-Explosives (CERFP) Team

2007 Acting Commander



Steve A. Leon

182 MDG

2011 Acting Commander 182 MDG

2017-2019 Commander and Officer in Charge of Optometry, 182d Medical Group

MAJOR AWARDS AND DECORATIONS

Meritorious Service Medal Air Force Achievement Medal (1Device)

Air Force Outstanding Unit Award (5 Devices)

National Defense Service Medal

Global War on Terrorism Service Medal

Air Force Longevity Service (4 Devices)

Armed Forces Reserve Medal (3 Devices)

Small Arms Expert Marksmanship Ribbon (Pistol)

Air Force Training Ribbon STATE AWARD AND DECORATIONS

Illinois Military Medal of Merit

Illinois Military Long and Honorable Service Medal (3 Devices)

Illinois Military Attendance Ribbon (10 Devices)

His military duties will come to an end on November 25, 2019 after serving 23 years.

While his careers of service are his passion, his family is what is most important to him. He is married to his high school sweetheart, Pam (Moore), for 46 years and together they have 3 daughters: Heather, Jaime, and Stephanie. Three Son-in-laws: John, Tim, and Thomas. Four grandkids: Reese, Riley, Matthew, and Luke. His grandkids are his everything and he always finds time to attend their activities and spend quality time with his family.

Combining his love for mowing the yard (and yard work in general) and his devotion to family, he mows and tends to his mother-in-law's yard all summer. The perfect match!

Steve can be serious, but he also has a playful side. His toys include his street rods, his classic Triumph, and his Harley. He is a loyal friend to his buddies from the class of '69', and legend has it that he can "hold his own on the golf course."

Cont. pg. 2