

ZEST: No slowing down

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mers ago.

After grieving her loss, Fleisher recovered his zest for living by attending classes and becoming an inspiration at the Senior Resource Center which is physically attached to but no longer officially affiliated with the Church of the Messiah in Chester.

"Four years ago, he was a physical caregiver for his wife," said Jim Hackett, the senior resource center executive director. "He got bigger and stronger and better the more he came here which enabled him to take care of her.

"I thought for sure when she passed away that he was going to be gone, too. He came back here and took part in work exercise programs."

Shining Example

In recent years, Fleisher has become an advocate for the center and has emerged as a stunning example of how seniors can keep active and vital no matter their age.

"He just wants to talk," said the Rev. Margaret Otterburn. "He just wants to share. He's the kindest, nicest person you ever want to meet. When you think of his experiences in the war and all that he went through. It's just a thrill that we have him."

Fleisher has become a favorite among the seniors at the center and someone everyone looks forward to seeing.

"Some time last year, Marty came to the stretch bands class," Otterburn said. "The regular peer leader couldn't make it. I asked the ladies, somebody has to be the peer leader today and they all said Marty should do it. We asked him. 'Of course,' he said. Since then it has been almost every week.

Most people think being 94, 95 and being a peer leader is an amazing thing. He takes it in stride."

Fleisher is an enthusiastic talker with a ready smile. He relates stories from years past with surprising detail and has become a celebrity in some circles. In a nine-month span between 1944 and 1945, he flew 65 combat missions in Europe and earned 12 air medals for his efforts during World War II. He has talked to groups large and small about his war experiences.

On Friday through Sunday, June 5, 6 and 7, Fleisher will join other veterans at the World War II weekend, "A Gathering of Warbirds," at the Mid-Atlantic Air Museum in Reading, Pa., to talk about old times.

"Marty is one of a kind," said Woody Burgen, adjutant for American Veterans Association Post 1776. "When I joined the group in 2006, it was just eight or nine guys from World War II who got together for coffee once a month. Since that time we've quadrupled the membership. Marty has been a big part of that.

"What's important to him is getting the word out to people particularly the kids who don't get enough information about World War II — about what it means to be an American and how proud they should be of America and what it has done."

The number of World War II veterans steadily fades. Sixteen million participated in the conflicts in Europe and the Pacific. Now their numbers have dwindled to under two million. Like many veterans, Fleisher was reticent to talk about his experiences in the service in the beginning.

In recent years, he has discovered that he doesn't mind sharing but he knows that everyone who fought has a unique perspective. Some veterans have experiences too painful to relive.

"It's good for veterans to try and talk to people and try and tell them about the war," Fleisher said. "I read about some of the service people and what they did and what they went through. I look up to these guys. My experiences compared to theirs were like night and day."

Fleisher's fascination with flying began when he was 5 years old and he saw his first airplane. He could never raise enough money to go to flight school and was attending airplane mechanics school when he was drafted. That was his opportunity to become a pilot. Although he had thoughts of continuing after the war, his wife wasn't a fan of flying and the finances at the time did not work in his favor.

Fleisher said he has no regrets. He will talk about flying and his war experiences with anyone who asks, especially on his birthday. Everyone expects many more birthdays in his future. As for his secret for reaching 95 years of age, well that's a secret even to him.

"How I made it, I don't know," Fleisher said. "The only thing I can figure out is that maybe it is what my mother used to tell us all when we were kids. She said to be content with what you've got. As long as you are content, you don't envy other people. You don't aggravate yourself over what you don't have. I had a life that was not too stressful because I let it be. Fortunately, I made the proper choices in all of my endeavors."