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Longtime Lafayette resident turns 100

Submitted by Betty La Porte



Birthday celebration at a Lamorinda Village Coffee and Conversation meeting Photo Kathryn Ishizu

Lafayette's Joseph M. Fox III celebrated his 100th birthday on Nov. 20. And he did it as he does just about everything - with vigor and enthusiasm. Talk to people who know Joe, and they all say the same thing: he has been remarkable at just about any age, and the 100-year-old Joe did it again with the elegant slideshow that was presented to an admiring group of partygoers. One tech-savvy 15-year-old was overheard saying: "That's really awesome! I can't even do that." Ah, well. That's Joe, with the skills and know-how that's the envy of everyone. Who knew, at 100 years, that Joe would be a faithful regular at Lamorinda Village's chair yoga? And who could imagine someone at 100 years old swimming every day? And how many of us know anyone who has written three books that have all been published after the age of retirement?

Joe and his wife, Betty Larkin Fox, moved their family of six children (two daughters and four sons) to Lafayette in 1966 from the East Coast when Joe became employed by Bechtel as a chemical engineer. Betty was

active in the local real estate market. Together they kept the home fires burning, participated in the kid's school activities, made lasting friendships in the community, and traveled when there was time.

In 1992, when all the kids had their college degrees, Betty died after a short illness. Joe carried on, keeping the family home a place where everyone could gather when schedules permitted. Four years later, Joe met and married Shirley Pugh, and the Fox family, along with Shirley's three sons, became a blended family of adult children, albeit a scattered one. Even so, family gatherings were frequent.

It was about this time, having retired from Bechtel, and with time on his hands, Joe became interested in tracing the history of the Fox family. Fox is not an uncommon name, and many emails to people with that name led to interesting connections. Joe became an expert in Y-DNA and his research led to a published book entitled "Growing with America; the Fox Family of Philadelphia." He expanded the information by writing his second book "Growing with America - Colonial Roots." In 2004, Joe started the Fox Y-DNA project which has over 300 members. Even though he is Joseph Mickle Fox the third, there are eight other ancestors by the same name, which will surely confound and confuse future genealogists.

Now a full-fledged author, Joe was on a roll and authored one more book about an ancestor, titled "Mary Hite's Story: A Pioneer Woman with Grit." It was published in 2019, before the pandemic, when Joe was a mere 97 years old.

His research and writing, which started as a hobby and grew into an almost full-time commitment, gets credit from Joe for his good health and longevity. "I honestly believe that keeping busy with something that interests me is responsible for my well-being as I aged."

Sadly for Joe, Shirley passed away in March 2020. By this time, Joe had hung up his pool leaf catcher, sold the family home and moved to Byron Park. But hold on! His story continues to grow! At Byron Park, he has made a ton of friends, played Romeo in a recent Byron Park production of "Romeo and Juliet," and with his children, hosted a birthday celebration to end all celebrations. Joe was the perfect host and birthday celebrant. It was the hottest ticket in town and was a party for the "ageless."

Reach the reporter at: info@lamorindaweekly.com

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