

Monthly Publication from the Zephyrhills Historical Association

Volume 23 – Number 6

July 2021

There will be NO scheduled business meeting in August.

Future Meetings

While we are not having a business meeting in August, but we are making plans for a meeting in September. At the present time, though, we are not sure of the meeting **place**. The library will no longer be open until 7 p.m. on Tuesdays, so if we continue to meet there we most likely will have to meet earlier. I am hesitant to make that move because we are beginning to attract a younger group of members, many of whom still work. Another possibility would be to return to the Depot Museum for our meetings. Negotiations with the City have not started on this, so we'll have to let you know. If we are able to work it out we may be able to go back to our original times, which were an hour later than our current ones. We shall see.

Remembering Bob Porter

Many of us bid farewell to our friend Bob Porter at his memorial and graveside services. He was our true friend and a most valued member of the Zephyrhills Historical Association. Clreen sent along this picture of the cars used in the processional. There was also a fly-over in Bob's own plane. This was a fitting tribute to a great man. We salute you, Bob Porter!



Photo taken by Bob's granddaughter, Fay Geiger

We may get back to our fundraisers in September at Sergio's.



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Jeff Miller

Pasco County Historian

For a walk down memory lane visit

www.fivay.org

Please consider contributing old photos
for the website.

My email address is on the opening page

ZHA Mission Statement

The mission of the Zephyrhills Historical Association is to research, gather, and share local historical information with all generations, through our literature, programs, and scholarships, and to volunteer assistance to the Zephyrhills Depot Museum and WWII Barracks Museum.

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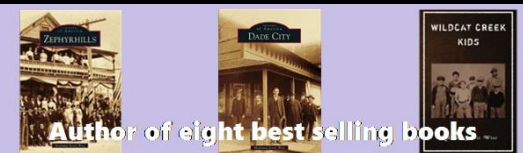
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Bob Porter and the Golden Knights

by Jerry Pricher

When I was in high school one of my most memorable experiences was watching the Golden Knights train at our own airport. I spent many nights out at the airport watching them jump. I got to know some of the men in the squad, and they were incredibly nice to those of us who came to watch them. One man I became very close to was killed a few months later in an accident. I don't recall the exact nature of his death, but I think it was in a plane crash. Bob Porter told me, but I have now forgotten, and I can no longer seek his counsel. I was a junior in high school, and it was winter, so it could have been in 1967 or 1968.

History

In 1959, nineteen Airborne Soldiers from various military units formed the Strategic Army Command Parachute Team (STRAC). Brigadier General Joseph Stilwell Jr. gathered the Soldiers with the intent of competing in the relatively new sport of skydiving, which at that time was dominated by the Soviet Union. That year, the U.S. Army team began representing the United States on the international competition circuit, and performed their first demonstration in Danville, Virginia. Two years later, the Department of Defense announced that the STRAC team would become the United States Army Parachute Team.

By 1962, the team earned the nickname the "Golden Knights". "Golden" signified the gold medals the team had won while "Knights" alluded to the team's ambition to conquer the skies. Since then, the Golden Knights have conducted more than 16,000 shows in 50 states and 48 countries, reaching an average of 60,000 people per show. The team has earned the U.S. Army 2,148 gold, 1,117 silver, and 693 bronze medals in national and international competition. Team members have also broken 348 world records.

The Golden Knights are one of only three Department of Defense-sanctioned aerial demonstration teams, along with the U.S. Navy Blue Angels and the U.S. Air Force Thunderbirds. The team is composed of approximately 95 men and women, which includes four parachute units, an aviation unit and a headquarters. The demonstration teams, which use five dedicated aircraft, perform at more than 100 events per year. The tandem section is known for taking Soldiers, celebrities and heads of state on jumps, and the competition section focuses on winning national and international skydiving events.

Bob Porter was instrumental in bringing the Golden Knights to Zephyrhills. As I remember Bob telling it, the situation started with a chance meeting between Bob and one of the commanding officers. The squad was plagued by bad weather in winter training where they were located, so Bob suggested they come here to train during those months.

I vividly remember one particular night when they were attempting to set a new world record. The procedure involved the jumpers forming a linked-arm maneuver in the sky, followed by a targeted landing. There was a circular landing area with a disc in the center. The disc was maybe two feet in diameter. I remember watching every member of the jump firmly landing on that small disc except for the very last jumper. He stretched all he could but only managed to reach about a foot-and-a-half from the center disc. It was something to behold!


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In the coming years Zephyrhills would become a premier jump site with a world reputation. We had many visitors from Europe and elsewhere staying in Zephyrhills and skydiving at the airport. I remember seeing them often at the grocery store or elsewhere in town, especially during the winter months. I'm not sure any of this would have happened had it not been for our friend, Bob Porter. He was truly a great citizen of Zephyrhills and a friend to almost everyone. He will be missed.

Obituary for Bob Porter

Charles Robert "Bob" Porter passed away at home surrounded by his family on June 26, 2021. Bob was born in Brighton, Iowa on July 5, 1929.

After graduating high school, Bob served his country in the National Guard. Afterwards, he owned/operated a Ford Tractor dealership and later managed the airport in Ottumwa, Iowa.

Bob moved his family to Zephyrhills, FL in 1965 where he opened the first FBO and the original parachuting center out at the Zephyrhills Airport. Bob had numerous passions that he pursued in his almost 92 years of life. They included flying his beloved planes and helicopters, being a train engineer at Midwest Old Settlers & Threshers Reunion in Iowa, touring the country in his numerous Ford Model Ts and even built/captained a dinner boat in South Florida. Bob was a member of numerous groups, including the Zephyrhills Historical Association, the Fun T Club of Central Florida and was an honorary lifetime member of the Midwest Central Railroad.

He is preceded in death by his parents Verle and Margaret Porter, wife Penny Porter, two sons-in-law Tom Watson and Ferman Geiger Sr (**ZHS 1971**), granddaughter Wendy Geiger Servies (**ZHS 1991**), and grandson Eric Chaponniere. He is survived by his three daughters Nancy Porter Wells (**ZHS 1971**), Sandra Porter Geiger (**ZHS 1973**), Carolyn Porter Morris (**ZHS 1974**) and son Richard Porter (**ZHS 1976**). Also surviving are his 8 grandchildren, 12 great-grandchildren and 9 great-great-grandchildren.

Christmas in July

We were able to finally get together at our Christmas in July Dinner. Gail Fisher once again provided an excellent menu, and folks enjoyed our time together. Our scholarship winner from this year, Robyn Thomas, was also able to be with us.



Seated: Bill Kustes, Robyn Thomas – *Rosemary Trotzman Scholarship Recipient for Continuing Education* and Maryhelen Clague

Middle Row: Clereen Brunty, Jackie Lindsey, Jan Monroe, Anna Boone, Erica Freeman and Jerry Pricher

Back Row: Andy Nagy, Patty Thompson, Terry Lindsey, Polly Gill, Seth Pelfrey