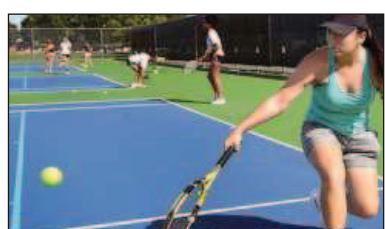


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IN LOCAL & STATE, B1
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IN NATION & WORLD, A3
HOUSE PASSES POSTAL BILL

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- Lloyd T. Hanson
- Vickie Louise "Vic" Meixner
- Harold J. Peper
- Gerald John Seitz
- Kenneth Leroy Truebenbach
- Michael Dean Uphoff
- Marvel Blanche Wieman (Willmsen)

MORE ONLINE



The week in photos
Each week the Associated Press compiles a collection of its best photojournalism. **View this week's images at mankatofreepress.com**

OPINION

Legislature
The Republican majority in the state Senate appears to be misusing its power over the governor's appointees. — A5

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WEATHER, PAGE B10

Humid
High in upper 80s. Low in upper 60s.



PERSEVERE

Sehe grew up poor but education made all the difference

By Mark Fischenich
mfishenich@mankatofreepress.com

Growing up in poverty during the Great Depression, watching an older brother die in an epidemic, surviving a stint in the U.S. Navy that stretched from Pearl Harbor to Normandy to Iwo Jima — Charles Sehe of Mankato knows something about living through tough times.

As younger Americans struggle through a pandemic and the worst economic downturn since the 1930s, Sehe agreed to tell his story of perseverance — with a few caveats.

First, interviews would have to be done via telephone: "This damn coronavirus has screwed up everything."

Interviews would best be done in the afternoon: "In the morning I'm hungry and in the evening I'm sleepy, so if you can get me in between."

There would be moments when he might need a few seconds to formulate his words: "I talk best if I've had a beer, and I don't have one."

And Sehe indicated he wouldn't mind being compensated: "My time is important. I figure about \$10 per minute."

His sense of humor persists despite the health problems that come with a nearly century-old body and despite a pandemic that has eliminated any outings, even for medical checkups, which have been shifted to online.

"I'm physically disabled, going blind, one functioning kidney. But my mind is clear and I have my writing, and writing makes you think."

So Sehe's 97th year on the planet has been an arduous one. But unlike his younger fellow-Americans, Sehe has experience living through grueling years. More than a few.

1929

Charles Sehe was 6 years old when the stock market collapsed and ushered in an economic depression the likes of which the United States had never seen. A third of Americans were unemployed, hungry, homeless or some combination of the three.

Sehe had a home in Ge-



Pat Christman

Charles Sehe, 97, understands that 2020 has been an extraordinarily difficult year for many Americans. But Sehe, who has some experience persevering through difficult times, asks people to not lose hope.



Pat Christman

Sehe received the Legion of Honour medal from the French government for his service aboard the USS Nevada at Normandy, Cherbourg and Toulon.

neva, Illinois, parents and siblings, and little else.

"During the early years, I was a poverty-level, undernourished kid who did not seem to have the mental and physical energy that other students from affluent parents did," he said. "I did not read well, I could not do math well, and I wasn't doing what other classmates were doing."

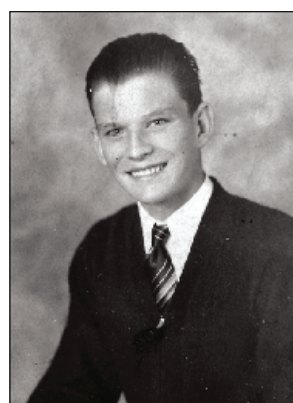
His father was born on an Indian reservation in New York. His mother was a refugee from Poland.

"My dad was a good

horseman. He joined Buffalo Bill's show, but because he was an Indian, he couldn't sleep in the same rail car. He slept in the cattle car."

His mother was put on an orphan train, landing with a family in Green Bay, Wisconsin, that needed a worker.

After John and Frances Sehe married, they received some government land near what is now Wisconsin Dells and attempted to farm. After falling behind on their taxes, they sold the land and moved to Geneva.



Courtesy of Charles Sehe

Charles Sehe graduated from high school in 1940 after surviving an impoverished childhood during the Great Depression. With limited job prospects, he joined the U.S. Navy.

"A lady had an unused house she was looking to sell. She allowed my parents to live there — unheated except a kitchen stove."

John Sehe had various jobs caring for horses, serving as a night watchman and working in a foundry. But he was jobless in the worst depths of the Great Depression. There were eventually six children and not enough money to feed them.

"We were on a relief program. We got powdered milk, lard, oleo, grapefruit at Christmastime, flour, sugar, salt. ... My mother was a good baker. When she baked, the smell — boy, that got me!"

Charles contributed fuel

Please see SEHE, Page A4

100 years of women voting

By Diana Rojo-Garcia
drojogarcia@mankatofreepress.com

A magnet hangs on Lynn Solo's refrigerator that says, "Vote," said the lady with the alligator purse," referring to Susan B. Anthony, known for carrying an alligator purse as well as being a pioneer of women's rights.

"The significance of the purse is that women should be able to carry their own. ... They don't need men, they don't need their fathers to be supporting them or their husbands," said Solo, president of the St. Peter League of Women Voters Minnesota. "They should be able to be on their own — independent."

It's a little reminder, Solo

Please see SUFFRAGE, Page A2

Page C1

A graphic details the 19th Amendment's journey to ratification.

44 more virus cases in region

The Free Press

MANKATO — Another 44 south-central Minnesotans have tested positive for COVID-19, at least one in each of the nine counties in the Mankato area, according to data reported Saturday by the Minnesota Department of Health. That marked exactly 100 additional positive tests in two days.

There were eight more deaths from the disease statewide, none in this region, and 746 new cases, according to Saturday's daily report.

Blue Earth County led the way in new cases with 13. Le Sueur County had nine and Waseca County had five. There were four new cases in both Sibley and Watonwan counties and three apiece in Brown and Faribault counties. Nicollet County reported two and Martin one.

The 44 additional cases in the region continued a trend of higher counts in the past week. On Friday, 56 new cases were reported. As recently as early August, south-central Minnesota was averaging fewer than 18 cases a day.

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SEHE: Fought at Pearl Harbor, D-Day and Iwo Jima

Continued from Page A1

for the kitchen stove by searching for stray lumps of coal and pieces of lumber along the railroad tracks.

1937

On Nov. 22, 1937, Sehe lost his big brother, John, who was 16 years old.

"My brother died from diphtheria. In Illinois, there was an epidemic. I took over his paper route. He had 33 customers."

Two-thirds of his 75-cent weekly earnings from the Aurora Beacon-News went to his mother to help support the family. The rest was reserved for Sehe to buy his favorite candies and a ticket to a movie matinee. With jobs hard to come by, he took the work seriously — learning every customer's name.

"I delivered each newspaper. I didn't throw, I handed each one to the person. At Christmastime, I got gloves, scarves and candy treats. See, that's what this damn thing is all about — relationships."

That life philosophy first began to germinate a few years earlier after some informal lessons provided at the Harrison Street School in Geneva.

Poor, underfed and struggling with his schoolwork, Sehe caught the eye of a concerned teacher.

"I felt a great sense of rejection, yet I had a restless mind with curiosity — my inner self, I guess they call it. Miss Bertha Johnson, my fifth- and sixth-grade teacher, took me aside after class hours. 'Please help me to clean the blackboards, the erasers, and to empty the wastebaskets. And we will do a little reviewing of our lessons.' Each day at the end of the class, I helped her as she helped me."

1940

Sehe graduated from high school. But with the Depression barely relenting, his options were limited in June 1940.

"While the other ones, the affluent ones, were off to college or joined the business of their dad, I didn't have a damn thing."

One alternative for poor kids was the military. Because of his paper route, Sehe knew what that might entail in coming months or years: "I read the front page. I was the first one in Geneva, Illinois, to know what was going on in the world."

Most of Europe had fallen to Nazi Germany with Great Britain largely standing alone. China was attempting to stem the 3-year-old invasion by Japanese imperialists. And the United States was beginning to mobilize troops in anticipation of entering the latest World War.

"During the mobilization, they took a lot of former Boy Scouts and put them in the Army. I said 'the hell with that' and joined the Navy."

1941

His company of 110 recruits was trained at the Great Lakes Naval Training Center. After basic training, the young sailors were notified of their assignment in an unusual way. They were given a mattress cover, handed it to the petty officer, and the name of the ship on which they would serve was stenciled on the fabric.

The first 55 were assigned to the USS Arizona, the second 55 to the USS Nevada.

"The guy in front of me, they stenciled 'USS Arizona.' He was No. 55 of my company. I was No. 56, assigned to the Nevada. That was a very good move for me."

Sehe wasn't on the Arizona, but his Nevada was the closest vessel to the



Pat Christman

Charles Sehe has been told that he might be the last man living who fought at Pearl Harbor, Attu, Normandy, Toulon, Iwo Jima and Okinawa.

doomed battleship in Pearl Harbor on Dec. 7, 1941, showered with fiery debris as the Arizona suffered a massive explosion.

As the only battleship to get underway that morning, the Nevada drew the full attention of the Japanese sneak attack. The ship was struck by multiple bombs and one torpedo as much of America's Pacific Fleet was decimated.

Sehe's battle station was the No. 4 searchlight, high on the ship's main mast.

"Since the searchlights were obviously not used during daylight hours, all I could do was watch this terrible, alarming, unbelievable nightmare unfold before my eyes," Sehe wrote in a history of the battle published by Warfare History Network decades later.

Gravely damaged, the Nevada was intentionally run aground to avoid blocking the harbor channel as it sank. Sixty of Sehe's crewmates died.

"After the attack ended, we were given galvanized buckets to pick up the numerous isolated body parts strewn around the 5-inch gun casemates within my division area," he wrote. "I can never forget finding mangled arms, legs, heads, and knee joints, as well as shoulder fragments and torn, burned body torsos—all unidentifiable because of their blackened, burned condition."

The success of the Japanese in surprising the Americans was so complete that many of the boys didn't even have time to get fully dressed before attempting

to fight back, Sehe told The Free Press two years ago during a ceremony honoring him at the North Mankato American Legion.

"Half-trained, half-dressed teenagers responding to their responsibility," Sehe said. "They didn't stop and think, 'What should I do?' They acted."

1942-45

The Nevada was refloated and received enough temporary repairs to allow it to steam to the West Coast in 1942 for permanent repairs and improvements. By May 1943, the Nevada was back in action, supporting Army landings at Attu — an Alaskan island that had been occupied by the Japanese for more than a year.

The conditions sailors faced in the Aleutian Islands were recounted by Sehe after a Free Press reporter noted — at a January 2018 American Legion ceremony — that the -22 windchills must be a little rough when you're 95.

"Why don't you try 72 days at sea in the Arctic Ocean, the Aleutian campaign? Horizontal rain, sleet, snow, heavy fog, freezing temperatures — all in one day," Sehe said then. "This (stuff) is mild."

After Attu was retaken from the Japanese, the Nevada and her crew were sent to the Atlantic to escort convoys hauling supplies and munitions to Europe. It fired the first shots of D-Day — hammering German positions in Normandy before, during and after the landings — and was assigned to eliminate mammoth German



Courtesy of Charles Sehe

Charles Sehe in 1944, his fourth year at war aboard the battleship Nevada.

guns that were keeping the Allies from using the port at Cherbourg. Then it was the Mediterranean and the Battle of Toulon, where the Nevada traded thousands of salvos with land-based German guns.

After repairs and upgrades in New York, Sehe and his shipmates were back in the Pacific, bombarding Iwo Jima and Okinawa in support of American invasions. On Feb. 23, Sehe was on rangefinder watch and saw through his binoculars a group of Marines raise a small American flag, attached to a piece of pipe, at the summit of Iwo Jima's Mount Suribachi.

At Okinawa, a Japanese kamikaze plane slammed into the Nevada's main deck, killing 11 sailors, injuring 49, and barely missing Sehe.

Sehe and the Nevada were still in the Pacific, preparing for the invasion of Japan, when the war ended.

The 75th anniversary of the formal surrender by Japan will be marked on Sept. 2. Sehe celebrated a different date — Aug. 14 — the 75th anniversary of the order sent to the Nevada and all other ships in the U.S. Pacific Fleet by Admiral Chester Nimitz: "This is a peace warning. Cease firing."

1950s

After the war, Sehe was left with the GI Bill and the expectations that Bertha Johnson had placed on him back in fifth and sixth grades.

"She said, 'You've got to know what you want to do.' She said, 'Charles, you have to get education. ... Live to get all the education that you're able.'"

He did.

"I just went through all the classes. I was thirsty. I was just starved."

Sehe earned a bachelor's degree in 1950 from North Central College in Illinois. In 1953, the year he received his master's from the University of Iowa, he married Lillian Lysaght. After Sehe obtained a doctorate in 1957, the couple moved between university towns in Illinois, Ohio and, eventually, Minnesota. He taught biology and the couple raised four daughters and a son.

"With those academic credentials, I was able to exert myself to give to others in the same manner I received," he said. "Now I was able to give back what was given to me."

His career was a repayment, in particular, to Bertha Johnson.

"I have never forgotten the appreciation of her, one who never married but loved children," he said.

Sehe retired in 1990 after 33 years as a professor at Minnesota State University.

2020

Now in their 67th year of marriage, Charles and Lillian Sehe live together at the Mankato home of one of their daughters.

The key to nearly seven decades of marriage: "I said, 'Yes, ma'am,' 'No, ma'am,' 'Yes, ma'am.'"

Turning deadly serious, he credits Lillian for supporting him and holding the family together when the horrific memories of war sometimes returned.

"I had two separate periods of blackouts, two periods of irrationality. They call it post-traumatic stress disorder. She stayed with me. She stayed with me."

Whether it's an impoverished boy and a caring grade school teacher, a teenager working his first job as a newspaper carrier, sailors fighting together through years of war, a professor teaching biology to thousands of students, daughters allowing elderly parents to avoid a move to a nursing home, or a 66-year marriage, the key is always the same, according to Sehe.

"For I have learned that relationships are what life is all about."

As another generation of Americans faces uncertainty, division and economic chaos, Sehe is reluctant to offer advice.

"I have a question: Does one generation such as mine have the obligation to tell another how to run their lives?"

Sehe doesn't think so: "They have their own decisions to make and their own counsel."

But he's willing to provide some hints of what he's learned. A person needs to know where he or she is headed and have a course laid out to get there. Otherwise, any movement is nothing but "useless energy."

Individual freedom may be important, but only if it's used for a purpose: "I have my independence, I have my individuality, but I rely on the wisdom of others to use those two correctly."

And it's important to remember that every generation's dream is that the next one will be a little better off. That was the case with the wealthiest parents in Geneva, Illinois, and with the poorest.

"All I ask is that everyone keep the faith. And keep faith with what every generation before them has done, so their sacrifice was not in vain," Sehe said. "Everybody has that responsibility."

Congratulations

Free Press employee of the month

The employee of the month for July is **Shelby Levos**.

Shelby has taken her new role in Classified Advertising by storm while still working as our Tap On It Mobile Consultant. She has conquered all the obstacles and unforeseen challenges thrown in her way all while bringing growth to the many projects and areas she is now handling.

With the hectic pace required, Shelby always keeps a positive attitude. There's a reason that people are taking time to write "Thanks so much for your help!" and "You were so friendly on the phone" on ads they drop off for her. Shelby is a definite asset to The Free Press Media team and is awe-inspiring and awe-some!

Thank you, Shelby!



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