

# Group Treasures Pa. Dutch Dialect

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MILL CREEK (York Co.) —

Lee Thierwechter pages through his loose-leaf notebook filled with Pennsylvania Dutch stories and sits down in his lawn chair which is set among a grove of trees by York County's Mill Creek.

Gathered in a circle around him are members of the Pennsylvania Dutch Heritage Group who have come to their annual picnic at the home of member David Sipe with the added attraction of listening to Thierwechter of Belleville, Huntingdon County, read his stories.

He reads mostly in English with a Pennsylvania Dutch accent — letter v comes out as a w — for those in the group who cannot understand the Pennsylvania Dutch dialect, but a word or phrase of the dialect still creeps in.

Writer of a column in the Pennsylvania Dutch dialect for a weekly newspaper near his home, Thierwechter has also published a workbook for those who want to learn more about the language. A retired manager of an Agway store in Belleville, he also teaches classes near his home and will be announcing new sessions in the fall.

Thierwechter is like many of the members of the group who spoke the dialect until they reached school age. Not only did they learn reading, writing and arithmetic when they entered school, these students also needed to learn a second language — English.

The language is a dialect from the Palatinate region of Germany and was brought to the United States by the early

settlers from that part of the world. There are several dialects under the umbrella of Pennsylvania Dutch, or as some prefer Pennsylvania German.

When members of the York group from different areas of the Commonwealth converse they will often note that they use a different word for the same object.

Orpha White of York, president of the group when it organized in the mid 1990s in an effort to bring people who spoke or were interested in Pennsylvania Dutch together, said, as a child growing up in the northern Dauphin County, the dialect was spoken at home. "It was all I knew when I went to school," she said.

At the time of the group's organization many people who attended the first meetings said they no longer had anyone to speak Pennsylvania Dutch with because the use of the dialect was dying out. Many said their parents frowned upon their use of the dialect because it showed you were poorly educated.

But today some of those who never learned to speak the dialect, even though it was spoken in their homes, are joining the group to learn more about the language.

One of those is Ruth Gingrich, of Mount Wolf, president of the group.

Ruth said, "We read about the meetings in the newspaper and my sister Rachael (Gromling) and I were very interested. We had very much background because our grandparents and my father and his brother always talked Dutch when they were together. And daddy's relatives are all from Lancaster County and they are

the River Brethren and a lot of them still use the language so we were interested, but I can't speak it."

Although the two sisters have taken classes to learn the dialect, they can't hold a conversation in it.

Ruth said she gives her time to the group because the member's goal is to preserve the language. "We don't want to see it fall by the wayside," Ruth said.

She noted that the group meets the third Saturday of each month at 2 p.m. in the community room at York's Galleria Mall in Springettsbury Township. All sessions are open to the public. Speakers are often on the agenda and present information about Pennsylvania Dutch and its origins. Members also attend Pennsylvania Dutch activities held throughout the Commonwealth.

Sipe, the group's treasurer, said he too joined the organization because of his interest in the dialect.

"My grandmother spoke the dialect, but when we'd go to town she'd say 'speak English.' They didn't want the people to know we were dumb Dutchmen," he said with a laugh.

"Our parents didn't want us to speak Dutch, but it was all right for them to speak Dutch because then we didn't know what they were saying," he continues.

"I've been in and out of it. When I was in the Air Force in the mid-50s, I met a first lieutenant from Lehigh County and he could speak Dutch. I got back interested in it again, then I got transferred and he got transferred," he said.

Once back home over the years he has taken classes whenever he found them available. "I'm still not as fluent as I'd like to be. I can read probably a lot better than I can speak it because I don't converse with somebody everyday, but I read it everyday."

"Very faithfully ever night I head up the wooden lane and after I take a shower I'll lay in bed and even if it's just one page I'll read," from publications written in the dialect, Sipe said. He keeps a Pennsylvania Dutch-English dictionary by the bed to look up words he doesn't know.

He hopes to see a teacher offer classes to area people who are interested in the dialect and one of the goals he wants the group to reach is continued preservation of the language for the younger generations.

David, who is often mistaken for C. Everett Koop, former head of the Food and Drug Administration, first grew his Amish-style beard 26 years ago. His beard, straw hat, and suspenders give him the look the movie moguls wanted when they



Members of the Pennsylvania Dutch Heritage Group gather at a picnic at the home of David and Shirley Sipe, Mill Creek Road, in York County.



Mary Malott, with friend Finley sitting on her shoulder, visits with Lee Thierwechter during the Pennsylvania Dutch Heritage Group picnic.

were casting extras in Tim Allen's movie "For Richer, For Poorer." He played an Amishman. Had they asked him to speak Dutch, he'd have been able to do that too.

## Safety Camp For Adams County Youth

GETTYSBURG (Adams Co.) — Would your child know what to do if an emergency happened while she or he was alone? If your answer is no or you're not sure, then let us present the 1998 4-H Safety Day Camp. It's coming to the South Mountain Fairgrounds on Thursday, July 23, from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

4-H Safety Day Camp is open to any Adams County youth ages 8-13. There is a registration fee of \$2 per child. This fee helps defer the cost of a catered lunch, a T-shirt, and other surprises for each participant.

The campers will participate in workshops including: Identifying Farm Hazards; Meet the Computerized D. B. Pest; Bicycle Safety; Fire Safety; Rototiller, Weed Whackers, and Chainsaws; Hidden Hazards; Firearm Safety; Safety Jeopardy; Pools, Ponds, and Creeks; and Disability Dilemmas.

Other features include

demonstrations on glow germ and grain in a bucket along with a possible appearance from Life Lion Helicopter. The day will conclude with a simulated farm rescue.

All campers will receive a catered lunch provided by Jane's Market. They will also have snacks donated by Utz and Snyders. Ten lucky campers will receive a new bicycle helmet when they attend the Bicycle Safety workshop. No one will go home empty handed. Each camper will receive a t-shirt, safety information, and other cool stuff.

The 4-H Safety Day Camp is sponsored by Progressive Farmer Magazine, 4-H Clubs of Adams County, Inc., and the American Trauma Society-PA Division.

For more information on Safety Day Camp contact the Adams County Extension Office between 8:00 and 4:30, Monday through Friday (717) 334-6271 or (717) 624-4525.



Lee R. Thierwechter of Belleville, Huntingdon County, reads Pennsylvania Dutch stories to members of the Pennsylvania Dutch Heritage Group. Thierwechter writes a column in the Pennsylvania Dutch dialect and was speaker at the group's annual picnic.

# HOMESTEAD NOTES

