



Chief J. Earl Walker fondly remembered

Earlier this week, rooting around the photo archive files in the basement for something else, I came across an assortment of shots of the late Havre de Grace Chief of Police J. Earl Walker Jr.

It was the same day Mayor Wayne Dougherty and members of the city council gathered at police headquarters to honor the memory of Chief Walker by naming the headquarters building for him. Also attending the dedication of the Chief James Earl Walker Jr. Public Safety Building were members of the chief's family, including his wife, Helen.

Interestingly enough, we probably had as many pictures of Chief and Mrs. Walker, as we did of the chief by himself. Obviously, they shared many anniversaries before the chief died in 1998 at age 71.

Another photo I found, undated, shows Chief Walker, then probably a sergeant, seated at a desk in one corner of a spacious room with shiny wood flooring, a pull-off date calendar and a Coca Cola clock on the nearby wall and a huge radio console at his side. Several feet away at another wooden desk is Chief William Bullock. From

information we have previously published, I would guess this photo dates from 1952-53 and was taken when the police department was on the second floor of the old city hall, known as the opera house. Chief Walker left in 1953 to manage a local cleaners, working part-time for the sheriff's office. He returned and took over the chief's job in 1961. My understanding is being chief of police in Havre de Grace in those days was prestigious, but didn't come with much security because you served at the mercy of the politicians. To talk with Chief Walker you might not suspect it, but as it turns out, he was a pretty astute politician in his own right.

I first met Chief Walker when I came to Harford County in 1972. My first assignment with *The Aegis* was covering Havre de Grace. I would say people greeted me courteously, though with a kind of wariness, which was understandable, seeing I was an outsider working for "the Bel Air paper," as it was usually referred to by the city officialdom. The one exception was Chief Walker, who went out of his way to wish me well and offer any assistance he could give. That was going to be important, because one of my first big stories was a fatal pedestrian traffic accident involving one of the city's more prominent residents.

Over the next 17 years until he retired in 1989, I had many, many pleasant conversations with Chief Walker. Even after I stopped covering Havre de Grace on a full-time basis and even after he retired, the chief and I would cross paths from time to time, and it was always a happy experience for me.

Another black and white photograph I found is of Chief Walker, sitting at his desk in uniform and wearing his hat, probably taken less than a year before he retired. He really did have that look of a lawman, and he was sure fond of putting on that uniform, especially when he was going to speak to the kids at one of the local schools, which he seemed to do once or twice a week, every week. It was fitting that a similar photograph, in color, was displayed at Monday's dedication ceremony.

To know Chief Walker was to understand the saying, "The policeman is your friend," was no puffy platitude. It was certainly a nice gesture to name the police headquarters after the man who, in the eyes of many Havre de Grace people, young and old, will forever be "The Chief."

ALLAN VOUGHT | Record staff



Brian Krista Record file photo

The SMILES organization hosts several charitable events throughout the year, including its most famous event, the free community Thanksgiving Day dinner, which is celebrating its 20th year. This year's dinner will be at St. Patrick's Church Hall on Pennington Avenue in Havre de Grace from 11 a.m. until 2 p.m. on Thanksgiving.

SMILES

EAR TO EAR FOR 25 YEARS IN HDG

By L'Oreal Thompson | Record staff

It all started with a phone call.

In 1983, then-Havre de Grace High School English teacher Don Osman, founder of the school's SMILES volunteer club, received a call from a perfect stranger.

According to Osman, the caller was from New York and was concerned about his aunt, who had fallen at St. John's Towers, a local retirement community.

"I was sitting at home one day and the phone rang," Osman said. "The gentleman said 'don't hang up, this is an emergency.' He was talking about his aunt and knew she lived in Havre de Grace."

Osman immediately went to check on the man's aunt and found her lying on the floor. The elderly woman was transported to the hospital and later released. She couldn't return to St. John's, however, because she was unable to take care of herself, so she was moved to a nursing home.

"I started visiting her," Osman said. "She had no relatives here. She was born in England and her nephew is in New York. I saw her every week to make sure she was OK."

At the time, Osman was teaching 11th grade English. His students wanted to go

out to nursing homes and talk to senior citizens about their Christmas memories.

"They gathered about 15 to 20 residents in the day room and recorded their memories," Osman said. "We came back [to school] and they wanted to go again."

The first year started with visiting nursing homes such as Citizens Nursing Home in Havre de Grace, which is now Citizens Care and Rehabilitation Center, Osman said.

"People heard about us and we expanded our base," Osman said. "There was nothing planned. I tell the kids it was fated."

And the rest, as they say, is history.

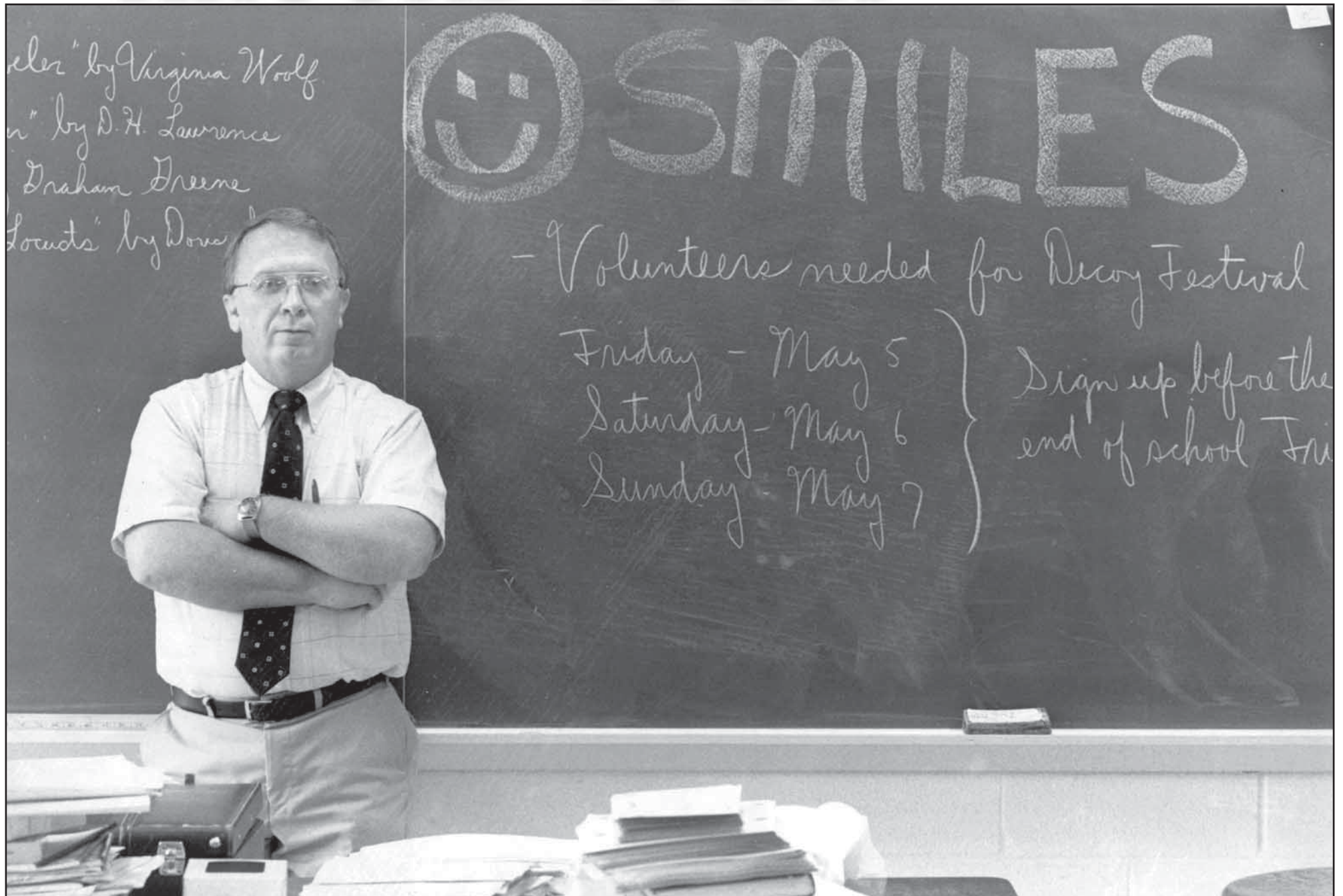
This year, SMILES, an acronym for Service Makes an Individual's Life Extra Special, celebrates its 25th anniversary as the first student service organization of its kind in Harford County.

"Basically we're trying to instill in members, plant the seeds for later on in life," Osman said about the service organization. "People who step up in the community become members of the volunteer corps. Some do three hours with us, some do 300 hours. They do what they can when they can and realize the importance of volunteering."

"It makes a difference in the commu-

AROUND TOWN

PEOPLE, EVENTS AND HAPPENINGS



Record File Photo

Founded by Havre de Grace High School teacher Don Osman, the SMILES, Service Makes an Individual's Life Extra Special, volunteer club celebrates its 25th anniversary as the first student service organization of its kind in Harford County.

nity and their lives personally. They become Little League coaches, people in churches and museums who understand the necessity of volunteering."

Based at Havre de Grace High School, the organization has grown tremendously. What was once a small group of 11th graders now boasts more 100 student

members.

"It's a really phenomenal year," Osman said. "It's been a very good year so far."

The organization hosts several charitable events throughout the year, including its most famous event, the free community Thanksgiving Day dinner, which is celebrating its 20th year.

This year's dinner will be at St. Patrick's Church Hall on Pennington Avenue in Havre de Grace from 11 a.m. until 2 p.m. on Thursday, Thanksgiving.

"We're expecting more [people] than in the past because of the situation in the country right now with the economy," Osman said. "Right now, we're preparing

for 500."

HHS students were busy baking pies last Friday in preparation for the big dinner.

"They baked about 24 pies today [Friday] and Monday [Nov. 17] they should be finished," Osman said after checking up on the students earlier that morning.

Although he is retired, Osman remains active with the organization.

"It's a real community affair, that's the beauty of it," Osman said about the annual Thanksgiving dinner. "I don't know what it is about this time of the year. People

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need to realize the dinner has become a community affair with people from all walks of life, people who choose to be there."

While SMILES students will be hosting the dinner, volunteers are more than welcome.

"We probably have 150 [volunteers] at least," Osman said. "It's so amazing, we've gotten so many calls. We never turn a volunteer away. I can't guarantee you'll be busy, but if you look around and see a need, fill it. If you see someone by himself, have a conversation."

People come from near and far to spend their Thanksgiving with those in need.

"We get people from out of the area," Osman said. "There's this family from New Jersey who found us on the Internet."

Former SMILES members keep coming back for more.

"There's a former student, who graduated in 1997, who has been with me every year. He drives and delivers meals and stays to clean up," Osman said of David Bowling, an HHS graduate. "We're just hoping a lot of former members are able to come back and share."

Meadowvale Elementary School students in Havre de Grace are also getting into the spirit. Students in the school's Patriot Program, a community service project based on citizenship, made more than 100 placemats for this year's dinner.

"We decided to try something new," Donna LeBlanc, the program's sponsor and Meadowvale teacher, said. "I ran into Mr. Osman and



Record File Photo

SMILES sponsors a senior prom for senior citizens in the Havre de Grace High School gym and a shopping tour and Christmas party for underprivileged kids as part of its charitable service.

asked if he could think of anything for us little guys to do."

Osman asked the group to make dinner placemats and the young students immediately went to work.

"I started cutting strips of autumn-colored paper and ribbon," said LeBlanc, who sent permission slips to third, fourth and fifth graders who wanted to participate.

"About 67 kids stayed after school doing them the first day. The following week, we did it again, and another 50 something came," LeBlanc said.

The Patriot Program students delivered the placemats to the SMILES meeting at HHS last week.

"I think it's going to stick," LeBlanc said of the program in its sixth year. "We nicknamed it the Little

SMILES and I think it's going to stay around. The kids go to the middle school and high school and stay involved."

So far, the SMILES organization has ordered 20 turkey breasts at an average of 9 to 10 pounds each, Osman said. The homemade meals consist of turkey, vegetables, mashed potatoes and other tasty treats.

"The morning of [Thanksgiving] we do vegetables and potatoes, gravy and everything," he said.

In addition to serving hundreds of local residents at the dinner, SMILES also provides delivery for those unable to make it to the church.

"The largest number of meals are delivered," Osman said. "Last year, we delivered more than 300

as far south as Edgewood and as far north as the [Conowingo] Dam and Cecil County."

To supply the free dinner, SMILES members raise funds throughout the year.

"We raise money from concession stands at football and soccer games, donations from organizations and private individuals," Osman said.

The extracurricular club also sends letters to local churches and contacts local senior centers, such as St. John's, Fairbrooke Senior Apartments and Catholic Charities. The club will also host a canned goods drive at HHS on Wednesday.

In addition to serving Thanksgiving dinner, SMILES also sponsors a senior prom for senior citizens and a shopping tour

and Christmas party for underprivileged kids.

"We spend about \$2,000,"

Osman said. "The youngsters come December 13 for a party at the school. This year we'll have a Mr. and Mrs. Claus.

"Once again, it's an extension of the community spirit of the holiday, the idea of sharing. People care and people share. We always thank people in our correspondence for caring and sharing," Osman said.

To reserve a Thanksgiving meal, contact Don Osman from 2:30 to 3:30 p.m. at 410-939-6600 or after 6 p.m. at 410-939-5412 before Thursday. Volunteers are always needed to help serve, make deliveries and to clean up after the dinner. To volunteer, contact Osman.

"It's something that's grown. The beauty of it is community support," Osman said. "If SMILES goes by the wayside, it's important to find some way to continue this dinner somehow because it has become an integral part of the community."

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