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## \*MEET YOUR NEIGHBOR: VERN SCHMIDT

Once in a great while you meet a person who seems to have some inner secret that keeps a smile on his face—a person so cheerful that you smile back even if you're having a not-so-good day—so friendly that he never sees a stranger—so positive in his approach to life that you think he must be filled with an almost irrepressible joy. Such a man is Vern Schmidt (F217). Hoping to tap into that joy and find the secret I asked him for an interview, and this is what I learned.

Vern was born in 1918 in Hannibal, Missouri—yes, Mark Twain country. He says that from earliest childhood he wanted to fly, and while he was still in his teens he learned how. As soon as he could get to England he joined the RAF's 57<sup>th</sup> Fighter Group flying the Curtiss P-40 Warhawk, The P-40 was a single-engine, single person plane that proved its worth during the Blitzkrieg when the Luftwaffe was doing everything it could to wipe Great Britain off the map. In response to my question of how many missions he flew he gave me an odd look and that smile of his, answering, "All the time. We were in the air just about every day for five years! The Luftwaffe was throwing everything they had at us, and though they were far superior in numbers they never knew how relatively few we were because we were always up there fighting them."

Once the war was over he came back to his family and enrolled in the University of Missouri. During his college years one of his best friends was a young man who lived with his family just a block away from the Schmidts in the Clifton Park neighborhood of St. Louis. Vern's buddy had a twin sister named Dot, and as soon as he mentioned Dot that look came over his face and stayed there."A man isn't really alive until he marries," he said, "and the smartest thing I ever did was marry that girl. She brought stability and a knack for intelligent decisions. She was a wonderful woman." Dot and Vern were married in February of 1946, and their union lasted 66 years until her death in early 2012. They have two fine sons of whom Vern is very proud, Reed, who lives in California, and Ward, a Houstonian. Both are married and have daughters to whom Vern is devoted.

His field was Marketing, and his career took them to a variety of places to live, one of which was Dallas. That was their first taste of Texas, and they liked it. Once their children were grown they indulged what they called their "itchy feet" and travelled a great deal on cruises and other trips.

With a son living in Houston they came to Treemont in 2005 and felt they had found the perfect milieu for them. They liked the convenient

location and tree-shaded campus, but even more they liked the people, both staff and residents.

Dot played the piano and wrote poetry, and Vern was active in the Troubadours, a group who used to produce a bi-monthly variety talent show. Now with Dot gone, at age 94 Vern spends more time resting, and continues to flatter the ladies with such things as a respectful but delighted look and the comment, “You’re one of the good lookers!” That’s an almost universal winner at any age, no matter how unlikely it may be. He is a familiar figure in the hallways and the dining room, still on his feet though he does use a walker most of the time now.

Perhaps the best way for you to know Vern as he is would be to quote directly from his answers to my questions toward the end of the interview.

**Question:** If you had your life to live over, what would you do differently?

**Answer:** Not a thing. I’ve had a grand life, great wife, wonderful family. I wouldn’t change a thing, though I would love the chance to do it all again for the fun of it!

**Q:** What advice would you give to a young man just starting out?

**A:** Be careful how you marry. That’s the most important decision you’ll ever make, and you want someone who’ll be a real partner, a helpmeet, and a playmate. Someone to love---

**Q:** Vern, you’re so good-natured, so contented, so happy in your own skin. What makes you tick? What gives you such a positive outlook?

**A:** (without any hesitation) My faith. I was brought up Methodist and still am. During the war there was much that was difficult and sad, but faith brought me through—along with a sense of humor. And in all those air battles during the War, I was never even slightly wounded. I am a man who has been greatly blessed.

**Dot and Vern at Treemont, 2008**

**Merry Christmas to all**