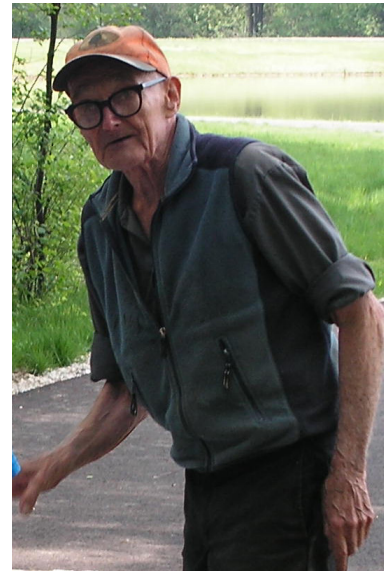


Remembering Mr. Mugrage

By: John Gladden, Former Communications Coordinator



I will always remember the first time I met Richard Mugrage.

It was a hot June day in 2005, and I'd been invited on a walking tour of the Mugrage farm on Windfall Road in Granger Township. Richard and his wife, Beverly, had just donated their 102-acre property to the park district. In 2013, it became Carolyn Ludwig Mugrage Park -- named for Richard's mother -- and is one of the busiest parks in the county.

Richard was 84 at the time. He was tan and limber, dressed in work clothes and black-rimmed glasses. He was not tall, but he walked with long strides. He moved fast, talked fast, and reflexively stooped to cast aside tree branches that had fallen onto the trail. He had the energy and enthusiasm of a teenager. More, actually.

You and I probably don't know our own houses as well as Richard knew every square foot of that farm, his home since 1927. It was his mom's tenacity that enabled the family to hold on to it through the Great Depression when so many other farms were in foreclosure. She bred dogs, raised chickens, and sold cakes and pies to help pay the mortgage.

Richard was a World War II veteran of the U.S. Navy, serving in campaigns in Africa and Europe. He helped maintain amphibious landing crafts called LSTs. Crews labored day and night preparing the ships for an invasion, then watched them return a few days later, looking like they had been through war and back. They'd immediately set to repairing the crafts for the next Allied landing. Fixing things. It was in Richard's blood.

"I wasn't in the 'Navy,' really," he said, jokingly, in 2016. "I was in the amphibious force. Everything we had ran aground. The Navy doesn't run aground!" He was a happy person. He had a great sense of humor and an equal sense of wonder.

Richard went to welding school on the GI Bill and made his living at Goodyear Tire & Rubber Company in Akron as a master machinist, but he made his life on that farm -- raising a family, building a house with his own hands, cutting firewood, planting trees, making trails, encouraging nature to reclaim old cropland.

He was of the generation that threw nothing away. When something broke, you got out your tools and fixed it. When you needed something, buying it was the last resort. The first thing you did was look around at the pieces, parts, and scraps on hand to see if you could fabricate what you needed. He once made a dump cart out of a discarded chest freezer. That was Richard.

He passed away peacefully on February 28 -- just weeks after celebrating his 100th birthday. Richard and Beverly were married 64 years.

She is every bit as extraordinary. Beverly earned her master's degree at age 40 and a Ph.D. at 51 -- all while raising four children. She retired from The University of Akron after a 30-year career teaching mathematics. Not only was she typically older than most of her fellow



Fishing is a popular activity on the three-acre pond.



Richard and Beverly Mugrage (seated) and their family attended the grand opening.



The inclusive playground is a favorite destination for many local families.

graduate students, Beverly was often the only woman in her math and science classes. Her husband always encouraged her to keep going. The Mugrages' philanthropy includes the establishment of a scholarship through the American Association of University Women of Medina County.

Beverly is more philosophical than her husband. She once said Richard embodied the Native American belief that land is like the sky: It belongs to everyone and to no one in particular. It's something better given than sold.

Appraised at \$4.5 million, the Mugrage property represents the largest donation in the park district's 56-year history in terms of monetary value. With Richard and Beverly's blessing, frontage on State Route 18 was sold to Hospice of Medina County. The proceeds gave the park district the matching funds to qualify for a Clean Ohio grant to purchase the state's largest inland natural lake -- Chippewa Lake -- in 2007.

How many of us would make that choice? Option A: Sell your property, become a millionaire, and never cut a stick of firewood again. Never spend time welding a broken tractor part. Just go out and buy a whole new tractor. Travel and see fantastic sights. Or, Option B: Give the farm to the public, keep living your best life, and stay right there for the rest of your days, where every day you can see the fantastic sight of others enjoying the place you love so much.

That's the real value of Carolyn Ludwig Mugrage Park. There, on top of the Continental Divide, you can immerse yourself in the woods among the massive swamp white oak trees. Read the StoryWalk book -- you're never too old for a children's picture book. See the dogs romping in the dog park and the families on the sledding hill after a good snow. Listen to the kids play on the inclusive playground. Watch the graceful arc of a fishing line sail over the water and catch a glint of late-day sun as a solitary angler casts for bluegill in the pond.

To Richard, that was worth millions. And we are all the richer for it.

DONATION CORNER

Tree of Life

In Memory of Nellie Heaton
Jane Renee Chabrand

In Memory of Steve Hank
Park Staff

Other

In Memory of Judy Taylor
Terry and Liz McDermott

Connecting Children with Nature
Jim and Joan Krejci



Visit medinacountyparks.com for details about upcoming spring programs



E-newsletter

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