

## Obituary: Henry J. Gerards

**Posted: Sunday, March 11, 2012 12:00 am**

Born in Kennewick, WA, the eighth child of Joseph and Marie Gerards. While growing up on a farm near the Horse Heaven Hills, Henry dreamed of becoming a pilot. Including Henry, there were 11 members of his graduation class, the Finley High School class of 1935. Henry trained as a watchmaker and worked for his brother, Ralph Gerards, in LaGrande, until enlisting in the Army Air Corps, earning his pilot's wings, and called to active duty in 1944.

Henry was the co-pilot of a B-17 during WWII. He was stationed in Framlingham, England, and was assigned to the 570th Squadron, 390th Bomb Group. The plane was shot down in combat on their 23rd mission. The entire crew bailed out and made it safely home after the war. Henry spent over a year as a POW in Stalag Luft III in Sagan. He was honored with several medals for his service, including the Purple Heart.

He moved to Pendleton, Oregon, and married Margaret "Scottie" Thomson in March of 1946. He became a father to Bill (PHS class of 1962,) Mary Kay (PHS class of 1966,) and Jan (PHS class of 1974.) Henry worked as a watch-maker for Donnelly's Jewelers, and shortly thereafter, he and Scottie opened their jewelry business, Gerards for Jewelry, in downtown Pendleton. In the years to come they expanded into Spokane, WA, and Post Falls, ID. In 2003, Henry moved to Spokane to be closer to his family.

Henry was a life-long learner. Already a watch-maker and goldsmith, he completed course work to become a Certified Gemologist. Having been an avid downhill skier as a teenager, he became a Certified Ski Instructor. He renewed his pilot's license and completed advanced training to become a commercial pilot with instrument flight rating. He enjoyed flying his light airplane; a Mooney single engine.

The members of the Star Bottle Ski Club, and friends at Anthony Lakes and Spout Springs Ski Areas were close to his heart and always remembered fondly in his thoughts and stories. Henry began skiing in 1935 and was a pioneer in the sport. He bought his first skis from the Sears-Roebuck catalogue and they came with an instruction booklet: "How to Ski." He served on the Board of Directors for the Anthony Lakes Ski Area. Hank enjoyed skiing with his family and friends into his late 80's.

Other interests include golf, bowling, hiking, travel, and dancing. He was a member of The Chamber of Commerce, Rotary International, The Liar's Club, The Elk's Club, the Pendleton Country Club, the 390th Memorial Museum Foundation, and the Star Bottle Ski Club. He remained active through dancing, playing cards and competing in the Senior Bowling and Wii

Bowling Leagues. His team, Evergreen Assisted Living's "Fountains of Youth" won the first place Wii Bowling trophy recently, making his children proud!

Henry will be greatly missed by his children, grandchildren, and their spouses: William and Debbie Sargent, Mary Kay Gerards and Tom Rector, and Janis Gerards and Mark Buescher; his grandchildren: Scott Sargent, Kacie (Sargent) and Derek Janke, Allan and Lynn (Brault) Brown, Alex Buescher and Megan Buescher; four great grandchildren; and numerous nieces and nephews.

We remember a father who enjoyed being part of our lives, to be our mentor, and to share his love of learning. In his almost 95 years, he weathered many storms, appreciated life, and nurtured others to do the same. A memorial gathering will be held April 21, 2012, at The Pendleton Arts Center, 214 N. Main St., Pendleton, OR, from 1:00 to 3:30 PM. Remembrances may be sent to the American Red Cross, PO Box 4002018, Des Moines, IA, 50340-2018, whom Henry credited with saving his life while a POW, or The Umatilla County Historical Society, PO Box 253, Pendleton, OR, 97801.