

SHIRLEY DIEFFENBACH TO CELEBRATE 93RD BIRTHDAY

Oldest Living Williamsport School District Art Teacher

When *insideNewberry* learned that long time Newberry resident Shirley Dieffenbach was going to celebrate her 93rd birthday on January 8th we arranged an interview. We are pleased to share some of her story with you.

Originally from Reading, PA, Shirley Lengel's Williamsport roots were planted in 1945 when she accepted an invitation from the Williamsport School District to teach art at Roosevelt Jr. High School- now Jackson Elementary on Newberry Street. Before her move she was employed as an art teacher at Lower Paxton Jr. High School, her first position after graduating from Kutztown State College (now Kutztown University) in 1941.

Clarence "Red" Groover, Roosevelt's principal, introduced Shirley to Fred Dieffenbach in January 1946. Fred, who just returned from service in the U.S. Navy, grew up in Newberry; The Dieffenbach family ties to Newberry go back to the 1870's. Fred and Shirley were engaged in May and married August 3rd that same year. Before starting her family she attended Grad School at Penn State.

In 1950, Shirley gave birth to daughter Linda and son George followed in 1953. She remained a stay-at-home mom until 1956 when, at the behest of Dr. Clyde H. Wurster, Superintendent of Schools, she returned to work in the art department at the old Williamsport High School.

In addition to class work, she was an advisor to *Cherry & White*, the school's magazine; supervised prom decorations and held art contests and exhibitions. When the new high school was built, she was instrumental in setting up the art department. Through the years, Shirley saw many changes in the way art was offered to students; art courses became



Shirley surrounded by her artwork

elective and there was a broader focus to include design, fiber art and jewelry.

Because she taught by example and always tried to be positive and encouraging, art became part of the life-style of many of her students, many as hobbyists and some as professionals. Several are quite well known in the area such as Peter Koch, the stained glass artist, whose work can be seen at the J.V Brown Library and Rick Mahonski, designer of fine jewelry, who was greatly influenced by Shirley. "You could tell she loved teaching, she was so soft and loving and really communicated well; she made you feel successful," said Rick. An art teacher for 30 years at Hughesville, Rick modeled his teaching style after Shirley's. Students Max Ameigh and Shirley's daughter Linda (Dieffenbach) Lundy became art teachers and taught locally. Through the years Shirley has also designed jewelry, painted rocks and made quilts. Her hand made Christmas cards are collected and coveted by fortunate recipients. **On behalf of all your former students, friends and neighbors we wish you, Shirley, the happiest of birthdays!!!**



Roosevelt Jr. High School Faculty photo from The Roosevelt Review, June 1946. Shirley (Lengel) Dieffenbach is in the front row, first one on left. Fred Dieffenbach is the second one from left in the last row.