

Rotary celebrates hero's 90th birthday

By Jeanne C. Carbone
Executive Editor

The Rotary Club of Almaden celebrated longtime Rotarian and Almaden resident Malcolm Herschel Higgins 90th birthday at their April 7 meeting held at the Boulder Ridge Golf Club.

"When you reach 90, you have a lot to be happy about," said Higgins, a tall mountain of a man with a booming, friendly voice to match.

The meeting was part roast, part tribute to Higgins, a World War II and former prisoner of war veteran and 40 year plus Rotarian.

"I had the good fortune to travel with Herschel and his wife Bebe," said member Paul Consentino. "We bunked together in Tahoe and he corrupted me on Manhattans. We traveled to Germany and England. We cancelled the Ireland trip because we were having so much fun in England. We



Rotarian member **Malcolm Herschel Higgins** celebrated his 90th birthday at the Almaden Club's April 7 meeting. Photo by Jeanne C. Carbone



Member **Malcolm Herschel Higgins** (right) celebrated his 90th birthday at the Rotary Club of Almaden April 7 meeting here with **Bill Smith**. Photo by Jeanne C. Carbone

as a development engineer and programmer retiring in 1987. The Higgins' three children moved out of the family's Almaden home and had children of their own. He continued his philanthropy in the Rotary Club of Almaden and received a commendation from the City of San Jose from Mayor Chuck Reed and District 10 Council-member Nancy Pyle for his service to the country and the world in 2006 with his wife at his side. Sadly in 2008, Higgins lost his beloved BeBe after 63 years of marriage.

Higgins' service to the Rotary Club of Almaden is equally appreciated. Member and 5170 District Governor Roger Hassler said, "We learned more from him at our Fireside Chats than we ever had previously. "Everyone looks up to him," said Bobbie Guisto. Angie Hassler, the District Governor nominee for 2013-2014, remembered how Higgins stood up for her when members weren't sure they wanted a woman for president of the club. Summing up the Club's feelings for their nonagenarian member Joe Pileggi said, "Herschel is really a special person and a good friend."

"Some of the most memorable times I've had in my life have been with the Rotary," Higgins said at the recent birthday celebration. "I've never run into a Rotarian that I didn't like."

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Higgins

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even visited where he was shot down."

Higgins volunteered for military service and was inducted into the U.S. Army Air Corps in 1941. He left behind his high school sweetheart and future wife, Beatrice [Bebe] in Springer, Okla. where he was also born in 1921.

While listening to the Glenn Miller Orchestra on the radio, Higgins learned that Pearl Harbor was attacked by the Japanese and that the U.S. was at war. He was placed on guard duty at Kelly Field, San Antonio, Tex. and applied for flight training.

"I had always dreamed of flying an airplane since I was six-years-old and could nail two sticks together and pretend it was a flying machine," says Higgins in a 2006 bio he wrote.

He became a flight officer and went through combat training with the 100th Heavy Bomb Group as a copilot. He helped train other crews at various combat training sites. After three months as an instructor pilot for B17s at Blythe, Calif., he assembled his own crew, went through combat training again, then flew overseas to England and became a member of the 8th Air Force. His crew was assigned to fly with the 31st Bomb Group stationed at Polebrook, Northamptonshire, England in 1943. After four completed and three

aborted missions, Higgins was shot down on his fifth mission while dropping bombs on the ball bearing factories of Schweinfurt, German on Oct. 14, 1943.

"I ... became a guest of the Third Reich," says Higgins. "I spent a year and a half as a POW in camps Stalag Luft III and Stalag VII-A. Patton's third armored moved over our camp April 19, 1945 and I was again free."

After rehabilitation and a 60 day furlough, Higgins married his high school

sweetheart, BeBe, on June 29, 1945. After a month-long honeymoon, he reported to Coral Gables, Fla. for more rehabilitation and was released from active duty.

Higgins went to school on the GI Bill and received his electrical engineering degree from the University of Nebraska. His wife cared for their new family. He joined IBM and spent the next 37 years at several assignments in New York, Colorado, Oklahoma and finally California where he spent the last 17 years