

Zion Lutheran Member "Spotlight" – Elaine Jentes

By Ken Picking



There are loyal and passionate Ohio State Buckeye football fans – and then there are Elaine & Charles Jentes.

Since growing up on the family beef cattle farm west of Columbus, Elaine Lehnert started listening to the games of the Scarlet & Gray and Coach Woody Hayes on local radio.

Husband Charles, a walk-on offensive tackle for the Buckeyes from 1957-60, has owned season tickets, 7 rows from the field on the 15-yard line, for 62 years.

This past November, Elaine and Charles attended their 59th consecutive Ohio State-(she can't bring herself to say the M word) game, a 27-9 Buckeye victory in the cold and snow at TTUN's famous Big House.

"Yes, I have no love for That Team Up North," says Elaine, who rarely fails to ask her Lutheran Pastor for special prayers before important games. "When you grow up in Columbus, you are a Buckeye fan no matter what."

Anyone who attends 10:45 a.m. services at Zion Lutheran passes by Elegant Elaine and "The Ladies in the Back Row" every Sunday. Unless her daughters coax her into the front pews for holiday services, Elaine prefers sitting in the last row with Irene Rickett and Jan Wagner.

After years of following Charles' aviation career - he was a navigator for the Ohio Air National Guard out of Rickenbacher Air Force Base for 23 years - the Jentes moved back to Charles' hometown of Wooster, before planting permanent roots in Smithville 52 years ago.

They first met when Charles, metaphorically, "came off the bench" as a substitute date for Elaine. "He filled in and has been around ever since," says Elaine, giggling like the bride who tied the knot in 1964.

With Charles owning two low wing single-engine planes, Elaine's life literally has flown by. They have navigated the skies to Buckeye Bowl Games in California, Tennessee, Florida and New Orleans.

"My most memorable was an early morning flight over Grand Canyon," Elaine says.

A graduate of Capital University with a double major in elementary education and music education, Elaine taught for 31 years wherever Charles landed – starting in Sterling, OH, on to Lubbock, TX, Sacramento, CA, back to Columbus, and then Wooster and Smithville.

After the girls – Jill, Joy and Robin – became involved in youth programs at Zion, they were not about to attend any other church, and that's where the family has remained even after the daughters moved away. Elaine, 84, and Charles, 86, now have four grandchildren and Joy's "grand cats" while she moves from Chicago to Atlanta.

Elaine filled various roles at Zion – teaching Sunday School, joining Zion Circle, tending geraniums – but her favorite is being a member of Altar Guild since the 1980s.

"All three girls have helped me with Altar Guild," she says. "If I can't be at Zion on a Sunday, it throws my whole week out of balance. It's my anchor. The people, the pastors . . . I have such wonderful friendships at Zion."

Elaine is most encouraged with the new youth music program started by Zion Music Director Peter Woodruff.

"What Peter is doing is remarkable," she says. "We need to reach out to the people if we want to bring them in (to Zion). That's what Peter is doing. Pastor Marty is good at that, too."

"I'm from a very German background. I like stability," says Elaine. "Some things you can count on in life, and Zion is one."