



Toasts all around at Peacemaker Brewing Co. in Canandaigua for 104-year-old Eugene "Gene" Gerrard, a World War II veteran. Gerrard is now an honorary member of the Peacemaker Running Group. MIKE MURPHY/CANANDAIGUA DAILY MESSENGER

RUNNING GROUP HONORS WWII VET

Canandaigua man, 104, among the 'fun people'



Eat, Drink and Be Murphy

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USA TODAY NETWORK

CANANDAIGUA — Back in January, when ultra runner Noah Coughlan passed through the Finger Lakes region on his "Run for America: A Tribute to the American People," he met 104-year-old Eugene "Gene" Gerrard.

Gerrard, of Canandaigua, a Brooklyn native and World War II Coast Guard veteran who later served five four-year terms as a councilman in Brookhaven, Suffolk County, before moving to Canandaigua to be with family, shared with Coughlan his secret to longevity.

Say active — to this day, the 50-year volunteer firefighter continues to attend Cheshire Fire Department meetings — and this pearl of wisdom: Enjoy a beer at lunchtime, savor a gin cocktail at 3

o'clock in the afternoon and sip a glass of red wine with dinner.

That struck Jesus Melendez, who leads the Peacemaker Running Group. Its motto is, "Run, drink and socialize."

"I said, 'That is a guy we have to honor,'" Melendez said. "As a community-based group, we have to look after the legends of this community. And Gene is legend number one for us."

On the occasion of the group's 150th consecutive Tuesday "run-iversary" on March 10, Gerrard was made the first honorary member of the group and presented with a pewter tankard made in Sheffield, England, inscribed with the words, "Gene's Cup."

Gerrard, who was wearing his brown World War II veteran baseball cap, joined the crowd in a toast. Not done yet, Gerrard raised his tankard high again: "Have another one!"

"I love all of you people," Gerrard said. "God bless each and every one of you."

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Canandaigua's Eugene "Gene" Gerrard is an honorary member of the Peacemaker Running Group, which includes Jesus Melendez, left, and runner and Peacemaker Brewing Co. owner Todd Reardon. MIKE MURPHY/CANANDAIGUA DAILY MESSENGER

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The Peacemaker Running Group started with a handful of runners, and now its Facebook page numbers more than 700 followers, Melendez said.

Peacemaker Brewing Co. in Canandaigua is where it got its name and its start. The craft brewery on Coach Street embraces the concept that it's important to be more than a typical place to sit at the bar and drink a beer. Yes, it's worth having a beer or two here, but it's also a neighborhood spot for live music, trivia, making and getting together with friends, and, yes, running.

"Peacemaker is much more than a typical brewery," Melendez said. "It's like the Canandaigua version of 'Cheers,' where everybody knows your name. It's like a community."

The intent was to start

a group that offered more than just running, although they do a lot of it. Starting and ending at Peacemaker, some people walk about two miles each Tuesday. Others run the equivalent of a 5K race, and some go beyond that.

Peacemaker owner and brewer Todd Reardon is part of the 5K crowd.

"There's always people who run, no matter the weather," Reardon said.

Over time, the goal for the running group has become reality. Strangers have become friends. Good friends have become better friends. Friends have become spouses.

"It's definitely much more than a running group," Melendez said.

Maggie Hormess can attest. She ran with the group through her pregnancy and had her baby shower with them. She and her husband celebrated their 10-year anniversary with them.

Its members are Dem-

ocrats and Republicans, those who go to church and those who do not. They come from all over the Finger Lakes region, even Spain, where Melendez is from, and England.

"It's a cool gang," Hormess said. "Everybody gets along. It's all good times."

They do fun runs, such as during the holidays when they dress up like Santa or the Grinch and run from brewery to brewery as part of the annual Canandaigua keg tree lightings. Some will take part in more competitive runs, including in Syracuse and Rochester for St. Patrick's Day, but with a caveat.

"Any competitive run we do has to have an association to beer," Melendez said.

For many, the running group has become part of the tapestry of Canandaigua, donating to charities such as the Canandaigua Lake Watershed Association, Called to Care, Canandaigua and others.

Tara Babcock moved here from Indiana and appreciates what the group has done for her family and for the Canandaigua community.

"This has been our best friend group," Babcock said. "Fun people."

And now Gerrard, who is known to have a fun side, is one of the fun group.

"We are very privileged to have him," Melendez said.

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