

COMMENTARY

The Fab Floor is a beautiful tribute to my hard work

BY JERRY ZEZIMA
Tribune News Service

You can make book on the fact that I’m not a guy to sweep things under the rug. But you may be floored to know that I brought the hammer down on our latest home improvement project.

That’s why I had to clean my office of enough books to bury Moby-Dick so new flooring could be installed with the help of yours truly and my trusty hammer.

Actually, the hammer belonged to our contractor, Anthony Amini, who let me use it to pop a pair of planks in place.

It wasn’t the least I could do, but it was close. The bulk of the work, which took a week, was done by Anthony, who owns Performance Contracting and Management on Long Island, New York, and his hard-working helpers, Victor and Narlin.

They ripped up the ratty old carpeting in four upstairs rooms – three bedrooms and the office – and replaced it with vinyl floors that are fresh, clean and, thanks to my hammering, which somehow didn’t result in pain or bloodshed, beautiful.

“I’m going to put you to work,” Anthony told me when the guys started their work in my office.

Little did he know how much work I had already done in finally cleaning the office of so much stuff – papers, pictures, CDs, DVDs, plaques, clothes, mugs, cards, envelopes, receipts and, of course, books – that I’m surprised I didn’t find the remains of Jimmy Hoffa in there.

A lot of it was on the floor, which was covered by a carpet so worn and frayed that it must have been installed when the house was built during the administration of Gerald R. Ford. Since the carpet just turned 50, I wanted to

donate it to AARP, but I was afraid the organization would revoke my membership.

I had been cleaning the office in fits and starts – every time I started, I had a fit – for months. This was at the behest of my wife, Sue, who is neat, in both cleanliness and excellence, whereas I, to put it charitably, am not. If we ever won the lottery, we’d never collect the money because Sue would inadvertently throw out the ticket or I would put it somewhere in the house, probably my office, and never find it again.

The room had four large, overflowing bookcases, plus countless books lying around, just waiting for me to trip over them and hit my head on the floor, which needed to be replaced anyway (the floor, not my head, though Sue would opt for that, too).

I donated many of the books to my local public

library. The vintage books, not including “Moby-Dick” (see above), were donated to an independent bookstore.

All told, I wanted to find good homes for my tomes, which not only is true but also rhymes.

With the office at long last clean, Victor and Narlin began moving furniture – a large desk, two filing cabinets, three chairs and two remaining bookcases – and ripping up the carpet. Then they started to install the flooring, which came in long planks that had to be hammered snugly against each other.

“Mr. Jerry,” Victor said, “would you like to try?”

“Of course,” I replied. “I’ll show you guys how it’s done.”

Victor handed me a large hammer with a head almost as hard as my own. I knelt down over a plank and gave it a couple of swift hits. When Victor put down another plank, I hammered it next to the



JERRY ZEZIMA TNS

Columnist Jerry Zezima was congratulated on his floor installation skills, although he let the professionals do the work.

first one.

“Good job!” Victor exclaimed.

Narlin agreed.

I let the guys finish the office and do the flooring in the three bedrooms, which now sport area rugs

that I can sweep things under.

“You should write a book about this,” Anthony suggested.

“If you do,” Sue chimed in, “don’t put it in your office.”



MADELINE CARTER Las Vegas Review-Journal/TNS

William Brew, a 102-year-old tax preparer, enjoys watching planes at the Henderson Executive Airport on March 13

At 102, veteran keeps busy and still works preparing taxes

BY EMERSON DREWES
Las Vegas Review-Journal

HENDERSON, NEV.

He’s 102 years old and he can still do your taxes.

As a veteran, pilot and tax preparer, centenarian William Brew has stories to tell. Born in 1923 in Idaho, Brew has been to places that don’t even exist anymore, fought in World War II and lived through some of the most pivotal moments in American history, but now lives in Henderson.

His secret to longevity: “keep busy.”

And that’s just what he does.

This tax season, Brew has around 10 clients, mostly family members, although he says he has a hard time finding new clients nowadays.

“I wouldn’t be doing it if I didn’t enjoy it,” said Brew. “I enjoy trying to keep up with the new tax laws that come along every year.”

WWII VETERAN

Brew was a member of the Air Force before it was called the Air Force.

After the bombing of Pearl Harbor, when he was 19 years old, he applied for what was then called the Army Air Corps Cadets. But, before he was accepted, he was drafted as an infantryman in 1943.

He went through three months of basic training, then he sat for the Army Air Corps cadet exam. With help from his fellow infantrymen, who were college math professors, he passed the arithmetic-heavy exam. Then, for another three months he went to Syracuse for college refresher courses, despite his lack of a degree.

“The Army Air Corps Cadets were treated royally,” said Brew. “We had all kinds of good activities.”

Brew was assigned as a bombardier, flying a B-24 bomber, and was one of

the first crews to go overseas with radar technology. Stationed in Mindoro, Philippines, an island south of Manila, he bombed oil fields in places that no longer exist, such as Indo-China and Formosa, as well as Balikpapan and Borneo.

Briefly, he was stationed in Okinawa to prepare for a Japanese invasion, which never happened.

“We had two atomic bomb incidents from over Japan, which ended the war,” said Brew. “Good thing, because I might not be here.”

After the dropping of the atomic bombs, he was stationed in McKinley Field in Manila to disassemble his squadron, being assigned as squadron commander for the 528th Bombardment Squadron. During this time, armed with four Jeeps, they spent their days working and touring the southern tip of the Philippines.

“We came back United States on a old World War I German hospital ship,” said Brew. “Wow, it was slow. Took us 31 days from Manila to San Francisco.”

Through multiple typhoons, he arrived home to the U.S. and joined the Air Force Reserves, then left active duty to pursue his degree.

“Of course we had the GI Bill, which was wonderful,” said Brew on the bill that opened access to higher education for WWII veterans. “It might have been difficult always coming home or looking for jobs, so forth.”

PILOT AND TAX PREPARER

While obtaining his degree from the University of Utah, he worked for the Western Pacific Railroad Co. During this time, he also had his first of five children.

“She was born the morning I had a test at 7 a.m.,” said Brew. “That’s

the first test that I failed ever in school, for a good reason.”

Brew graduated in 1950, then took a job at the Western Pacific Railroad Co. in San Francisco and got his MBA at Golden Gate University. He got his knack for dollar signs and taxes at the railroad company.

“I started doing taxes in 1950 when I moved to San Francisco,” said Brew. “The officers, president, vice president, traders, they all wanted me to do their return for them. That gave me a good start to go into the business doing tax returns.”

Before leaving in 1983, he held several titles including director of taxes, director of internal audits and director of insurance.

Then, he started his own business as a tax preparer and just never stopped, same with flying, mixing his love of the two in many ways.

In 1986, he joined the Civil Air Patrol in Cali-

fornia and flew thousands of hours of search and rescue missions, eventually becoming California’s Group II Commander, commanding 13 squadrons, as well as mentoring personnel in finance and accounting.

For some time, he also prepared taxes for the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance, for people who could not afford to get their taxes done.

When Brew arrived in Henderson in 2001, he joined the Henderson Composite Squadron, and earned the rank of lieutenant colonel. He earned master ratings in finance, education and training, and personnel and assistant administrative officer, as well as serving as the chair of the finance committee.

Dana Surwill, public affairs officer for the squadron, has known Brew for around four years, saying he has brought a wealth of knowledge to the squadron, helping with personnel and finances.

“It’s not something that you get from a lot of squadrons,” said Surwill. “You don’t usually have somebody who’s 102 years old, who’s a war veteran and is willing to talk about this stuff, is willing to be there and be active and be a part of the community.”

Brew continues to be an active member of the squadron, acting as a resource, but also someone for younger members to look up to. When Surwill was a cadet in the program, she would look to Brew and say “that’s the kind of life I want to live.”

“It’s been an honor to be able to serve and volunteer next to him, as well as learn from him,” said Surwill. “He’s an amazing person, and you can just tell by the way that it exudes from him. He really lives a life of volunteering and a life of service, and it shows in everything that he does.”

He also enjoys his time in Henderson, calling it “one of the best places to live.”

Brew has five children, 17 grandchildren and “about 33” great-grandchildren. Even though he has lived through some of the most pivotal moments in American history, the greatest thing he’s lived through is “raising a family.”

Today he spends his days at his home in Sun City Anthem or at the Henderson Executive Airport watching the planes.