

A FORCE IN BUFFALO VALLEY

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Erlene Mikitka likes to do good works -- whether people ask her to or not. "I intend to die like I lived -- disturbing others," laughed the 83-year-old who was the energizing force behind the Buffalo Valley Community Center from 1974 until 1990.

When Miss Erlene hears of a wrong, she knows it's her job to right it. She's been known spontaneously to drive children great distances for medical help, to spend her own money to help feed those less fortunate than herself, and to organize cultural programs for anyone in rural Buffalo Valley.

For 16 years Miss Erlene and her husband, Peter, along with the volunteer ladies at the community center saw to it that the families who lived in Buffalo Valley had a place to go for entertainment and learning, and often, a substantial meal.

"The volunteers and I would get together once a month and cook and serve a meal to anyone who wanted to come," she said.

"And during tobacco stripping time we'd fix lunch every day for those working in the fields."

In addition, Miss Erlene arranged for guests to come to the old schoolhouse to teach ceramics, quilting, gardening and other courses, and the center would have Easter egg hunts and other programs for the children.

She proved to county officials that there was plenty that she could do that the working poor would appreciate.

"I'm not talking about poor poor," she said. "I simply mean low income families."

Miss Erlene began to think about programs for the needy when she and Peter moved to Buffalo Valley to be near their families in 1974. When she investigated the newly formed community center she learned that the poor and less fortunate were never invited to any of the programs held there.

"I went to Luke Medley who was a county judge at that time and asked him about becoming a director for the center. He said to talk to the LBJ&C Development Corp. which was funding a lot of the programs in the Upper Cumberland. They sent me to work at the center.

"It became an active place. We had weddings and gatherings and concerts," she said.

"We never needed much funding. We made money. The old ladies would make quilts and ceramics that we could sell. We did that for 16 years."

At one time someone offered to change the center into a ceramic factory.

"They said they'd be able to raise \$2 million a year. I said I wouldn't do it. The people needed our center for weddings and gatherings. I know there was a need for more jobs, but I think I did the right thing," she said.

The Buffalo Valley Community Center first came into being a few years after the old Buffalo Valley School closed down in 1965.

For several years the building lay dormant. At one point in the mid-1960s an area man offered to buy the property, but he said he was going to turn the property into a tobacco farm and store tobacco in the old building.

The county refused his offer.

In 1967 it became a community center and provided a place for senior citizens and others to play cards and have get-togethers.

When Miss Erlene became director in 1974, she had a new direction for the center to take. She added programs and speakers and she opened its doors to the entire community.

"Al Gore came here for breakfast early in his career. When he became a senator we had him out for lunch," Miss Erlene said.

"State Senator Tommy Burks would use this building when some issue needed to be settled out here. We had concerts and recitals in the auditorium. One Christmas we bought ten Christmas trees and stood them across the stage. Then we flocked the trees and put 400 red Christmas balls on them. It was spectacular.

"Then we invited all of the children in Headstart to come to a party. Those buses just kept coming and dropping kids off. We played games and had refreshments and sang carols. They had a great time," she said.

Were there any presents for the kids?

It seemed a puzzling question for Miss Erlene.

"No. It wasn't about presents. The party was the present, I guess," she said.

And youngsters used to come to the center for other things than parties.

"They used to come in to play basketball in the gym," said Miss Erlene.

To help pay for the wear and tear on the old building, Miss Erlene asked the basketball players to donate \$1 a piece when they played. One of the members of the board of LBJ&C disagreed with her allowing boys into the gym.

"He claimed that the boys were trashing the building and wanted to change the locks. He said it wouldn't work. Well, it wouldn't work for him," Miss Erlene said.

"As far as I know they always paid," she said.

Vestie Hancock, who was in one of the last graduating classes in the Buffalo Valley School in the 1960s and whose daughters both were married in the center, remembers the community center as being especially good for kids.

"There was volleyball and softball. All my brothers played ball here," she said. "There used to be enough kids to have several teams that would play against each other.

"And I remember when the field (across from the schoolhouse) was filled with young kids hunting Easter eggs or playing different games.

"Now there are no children. It's just a dead spot in the road," she said.

But she and Miss Erlene are hoping the dead spot is coming to life.

"They've done a wonderful job on the building. And the library is a great thing," Miss Erlene said.

"But I'd like to see them open a reading center here for underprivileged children. This could be a great thing if it is worked right," she said.

Miss Vestie agreed.

"A lot of stuff would bring people in if they'd just do it. Especially anything to do with children," she said.

Miss Erlene continued as director of the community center until 1990 when someone else was elected.

"I won't name him," she said. "But he took away the keys from the senior citizens and that was the end of their being part of the center."

Now, though, the building is again accessible to all of Buffalo Valley. Volunteers have come forward again to help with a new lending library situated where the gym used to be. And the hope is that these volunteers will indeed be available to help youngsters learn to read.

"You can't do anything without volunteers," Miss Erlene said.

"People always give me the credit for our community center, but it was the volunteers that made it work.

"The post office wanted to put a plaque up with my name on it in appreciation for my work. But I said, 'No way are you going to put up a plaque with just my name. You need to include all the people that worked so hard to make that center work.

"And they did," she said.

The following are the names that Miss Erlene remembers as being vital to the old community center: Hazel Bates, Geneva Boyd, Gertrude Boyd, Ethel Carr, Levola Carr, Dorris Chambers, W.C. Chambers, Mildred Christian, Annie Duke, Emogene Jones, Clara Jared, Viva Maxwell, Luke Medley, Macy Medley, Uda and Reggie Shanks, Walter Warren Shanks, and Oda Sutton.

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Buffalo Valley School, Putnam Co., TN

Dropping by one more time:

Several people who used to be part of the Buffalo Valley School and Community Center revisited the 1929 building which housed both and now contains a new library. Annie Duke, graduate of the Buffalo Valley School, is at left, then her daughter, Vestie Hancock who was a student in the 1960's, Shirley Puckett who graduated in the last class in 1965, Peter Mikitka who taught ceramics at the old community center, Erlene Mikitka, who was director of the center from 1974-1980 and Clara Jared who was principal and girls' basketball coach of the 1941 Division Champions.

Picture taken by: H-C Photo/ Camille Fliss Mayberry.

Most of the people in the Buffalo Valley community center story are no longer living.

Ethel Carr was Ethel Shanks, dau. of Lawrence Shanks, a bro. of Grpa Robert F. Shanks.

Hazel Bates was postmistress for years in B.V. Carolyn worked with her in the beginning.

Hazel was a Carlen and md. Josh Bates, both dec'd as is Ethel Carr.

Mildred Christian was a Boyd, dau. of Geneva Boyd. Mildred goes to church with Carolyn. She has a large family, one dau. is Shirley who md. a Puckett.

Annie Duke is living. She md. Blanchard Duke, dec'd.--his second wife. Annie lives on the road by Carolyn.

Oda Sutton was Oda Bennett ,dec'd. Her son lives where Uncle Walter once lived.

Macy Medley is dec'd, (not related) as is Luke Medley, son of Zina Medley who had a store there in B.V.

Viva Maxwell was Viva Younger . She's dec'd.

Clara Jared still lives in Rock Springs

Lavola Carr in the B.V. picture was Lavola Anderson, dau. of Ewin P. Anderson and Oda Carr(dau. of John Carr and Leona). Ewin P Anderson = son of Joe Anderson and Nancy. Ewin P = gr-son of Tho. Anderson and "Dump" Carr. Ewin P = ggson of Garland (Gallant) Anderson and Sarah Jones. Lavola Carr had 13 bro's and sis', I think.

Gertrude Boyd in the picture was the wd. of Guy Boyd of Rock Spgs. Guy Boyd was a son of Muncey Boyd and Cora Fletcher. Muncey Boyd was a son of Mama's Uncle Fate (Lafayette) Boyd. Gertrude still lives in Rock Spgs. where Cora and Muncey Boyd once lived.

Geneva Boyd (in the picture) is deceased. She was the mother of Mildred Christian. I don't know the Geneva Diane Boyd you listed.

Uda Shanks was Aunt Euda, wife of Uncle Walter Shanks. She was Euda Warren. She is deceased.

Erlene (Pullum) Mikitka Obt.

BUFFALO VALLEY -- Graveside services for Erlene Pullum Mikitka, 84, of Buffalo Valley, TN will be held at Byrd L. Jones Cemetery on Saturday, June 25, at 1 p.m.

Mrs. Mikitka died Monday, June 20, 2005, at the University Medical Center in Lebanon.

She was born on April 23, 1921, in Silver Point to the late Ruben L. and Minnie Jones Pullum.

Mrs. Mikitka was a homemaker.

Her family includes her husband, Peter Mikitka of Silver Point; a sister and brother-in-law, Marie and Lytle Hodge of Smyrna; nieces, Sharon Hankins of Huntsville, Ala., Jenny Hodge Sanders of Smyrna, Jane Pullum of Amyette, Fla., Cathy Pullum of Camden, S.C., and June and Cindy Pullum; three nephews, Bruce Pullum, Steve Pullum of Florida and Don Pullum of Camden; and special friends, Martha Sauceman of Silver Point and Jeff Robichaud.

In addition to her parents, she was preceded in death by a sister, Jean Pullum and brothers, Bert, Jessie, Dick and Leland Pullum.

Elder Woody Russell will officiate at the services.

Whitson Funeral Home is in charge of arrangements.

Published June 24, 2005 10:22 AM CDT: Herald Citizen Newspaper, Cookeville, TN



(L to R, bottom) Ethel Carr, Erlene Mikitka, Oda Francis Sutton, Geneva Boyd (L-R, top) Cecil Moss, Patty Moss, Mildred Christian and Pete Mikitka object to a newly formed organization which wishes to control social activities at the Buffalo Valley Community Center.

Herald – Citizen, Cookeville, TN: Wed. 18 November 1992.

Ethel Avo (Shanks) Carr, w/o Bailey Owens Carr. Ethel is the d/o William Lawrence Shanks & Marina Leona Maxwell. Erlene (Pullum) Mikitka, w/o Peter "Pete" Mikitka. Erlene is the d/o Ruben L. and Minnie Jones Pullum. Oda Frances (Bennett) Sutton, w/o Chalmer Solon "Hoss" Sutton. Oda is the d/o Christopher Columbus "Lum" "Daddy" Bennett & Dora Webb. Sarah Geneva (Whitehead) Boyd md Ernest Vernon Boyd. Sarah Geneva is the d/o Brad Whitehead & Arda "Artie" Bellar. Dorothy Mildred (Boyd) Christian md James Robert Christian. Dorothy Mildred is the d/o Ernest Vernon Boyd & Sarah Geneva Whitehead.

**SENIOR CITIZENS UPSET
WILL SEEK LEGAL RECOURSE
Community Center Situation Explored**

Herald – Citizen, Cookeville, TN: Wed. 18 November 1992

There seems to be some question as to who or what organization is or shall be in control of any events that will occur in the future at Buffalo Valley Community Center.

Last week, Erlene Mikitka of the Buffalo Valley Community informed a *Dispatch* representative that a newly formed organization headed by James "Bud" Alcorn (also of Buffalo Valley) was, according to her, "trying to take over the community center and throw out the Senior Citizens Group. As stated by Mikitka,

“he wants to take our keys and assume control of the community center bank accounts.” During that Tuesday (November 10) telephone conversation, Mikitka expressed her frustration with Alcorn and Putnam County Parks and Recreation.

“All that Parks and Recreation does for the Buffalo Valley Community is to mow the lawn. The Senior Citizens group buys paint and other things such as a refrigerator to keep the place up. James Alcorn (a member of the board of Parks and Recreation) has never done anything in 16 years,” Mikitka said.

She went on to inform *The Dispatch* that she and other elderly members of Buffalo Valley had been using and had maintained programs at the Community Center for the past 16 years. Mikitka stated the Senior Citizens Group had kept control of the center's bank account from which generally consists of monies collected from church groups that regularly holds services in the building and also from hay cutting on the property.

Later in the week (Thursday, November 12, 6 p.m.), County Commissioner Reggie Shanks telephoned *The Dispatch* stating his concerns related to the situation at Buffalo Valley Community Center.

“I feel like the Senior Citizens were definitely being mistreated and discriminated against. They've been there for years now and I don't understand the sudden change now. They're (senior citizens) good people and do a lot of good things. They're (Alcorn's organization) just trying to run them out and that shouldn't happen,” stated Shanks.

On Friday evening (9:30 p.m.), Mr. Alcorn contacted a *Dispatch* representative at home. He stated that he had taken actions concerning the community center upon his own and at the request of another person. Alcorn would not divulge the name of that individual and the reasons for the apparent “takeover” (a term used by Mikitka) were somewhat vague. During that same telephone conversation, Alcorn stated that an organizational meeting had been held at the Buffalo Valley Community Center on Thursday night, November 12, 1992, in which he, James Alcorn, had been elected president of a newly formed governing body, Mark Herd elected vice president, and Betty Williams was elected secretary/treasurer.

“There were approximately 30 people present at the meeting and we passed out by-laws and a set of rules and regulations for the center's use,” stated Alcorn. “I was asked to see if I couldn't get it back on sound footing again,” he went on to say.

When asked if the Senior Citizens Group had as much rights to the structure's usage and program direction as he did, Alcorn replied, “They do have the same rights.”

Mikitka had told a *Dispatch* representative that Alcorn had requested that law enforcement be present at the Thursday meeting.

“The Auxiliary Police were there by my invitation, because any time we have a meeting there's always fussing and fighting. I was determined it wouldn't be that way,” said Alcorn.

Concerning keys and the Buffalo Valley Community Center bank account, Alcorn said that himself, the new vice president (Herd), the church group, Parks and Recreation, and the Senior Citizens would have one key each. He went on to say that any other outside keys should be turned in. Alcorn said that, after December, the center's bank account would be taken over by the newly formed “board.”

Alcorn stated that the Senior Citizens Group had not held a fund raiser at the community center this year. He went on to say (according to him) Mikitka “had removed \$400 out of the center's bank account and had turned it over to other people.” Concerning Thursday's meeting, “I said something about the keys and she (Mikitka) just blew up.”

Mikitka stated that she had become frustrated at the organization meeting and had cried. On Saturday, November 14, she was even more frustrated, because the building gas heaters apparently had been turned off by someone.

“He (Alcorn) hasn’t set foot in this building for 16 years,” she said during an interview with a *Dispatch* representative on Saturday, November 14, at the Community Center in Buffalo Valley.

On Saturday, one of the Senior Citizens Group ladies said, “We do a lot of good here. We make up food baskets for the needy during holidays or when the need comes. Also we find clothes for the poor. We have dinners and never charge anyone that wants to come and eat.”

Mikitka verified the foregoing statements and went on to discuss the yearly “Homecoming” held at Buffalo Valley for community members and alumni of the center when it was a school.

“Nearly all of us went to school here,” said Mikitka.

During the Saturday interview, there were several Buffalo Valley senior citizens present at the former school, and Mikitka informed *The Dispatch* that others wanted to talk to our representative, but were sick and physically unable to come. When asked if they would be inclined to work towards some form of compromise solution with Mr. Alcorn, those people present at Saturday’s interview said they wished Mr. Alcorn would simply halt his actions and resign from the Parks and Recreation Board. Mikitka stated that she and the Senior Citizens Group will seek legal recourse and, also, they pan on contacting the Governor’s Office/State of Tennessee concerning the matter.

During the telephone conversation with Alcorn, he stated that the newly formed Buffalo Valley Board would hold a meeting on December 10, 1992, and he would like to work things out with the senior citizens.

For a copy of the Buffalo Valley Community Center Organization “Bylaws” and “Rules and Regulations,” look elsewhere in this issue.

<http://www.ajlambert.com>

1910 Census 9th Civil Dist., Putnam Co., TN

Dwl: 33 Family: 35

Pullum, Rubin Head M W 23 M1 (2 yrs. md) Farmer General Farm TN TN TN

Pullum, Minnie Wife F W 21 M1 (2 yrs. md) (2 children born, 2 children living) TN TN TN

Pullum, Bertelle Son M W 15/12 Single TN TN TN

1920 Census 13th Civil Dist., Silver Point-Cookeville Rds., Putnam Co., TN

Dwl: 18 Family: 19

Pullum, Rubin L. Head M W 35 Married Farmer General Farm TN TN TN

Pullum, Minnie Wife F W 28 Married TN TN TN

Pullum, Bertelle Son M W 11 Single TN TN TN

Pullum, Dick Son M W 8 Single TN TN TN

Pullum, Jessie Son M W 5 Single TN TN TN

Pullum, Anna M. Dau F W 2/12 Single TN TN TN

Presley, Adeline Servant F W 29 TN TN TN

*See The Pullum Family: Anderson Family Stories: <http://www.ajlambert.com>