

Publication: Philadelphia Inquirer - Philly Edition; Date: Feb 9, 2015; Section: Local News; Page: B1

At 99, Charlie Vogel is a star interviewer on his Chester County retirement home's TV station.

# Big names flock to Hershey's Mill just to talk to him

By **Michaelle Bond** INQUIRER STAFF WRITER

Charlie Vogel is a familiar face — a celebrity of sorts — in the Hershey's Mill retirement community in East Goshen, Chester County.

In a dozen years or so, he has done more than 100 interviews for the community's Channel 20 TV station, which reaches 1,700 homes.

Among his most memorable guests were former Phillies manager Charlie Manuel, Phillies second baseman Chase Utley, Phillies' Hall of Famer Richie Ashburn, and TV weather forecasters Herb Clarke and Cecily Tynan.

Vogel also interviewed Bill Campbell, the famed Philadelphia sports broadcaster who called Wilt Chamberlain's 100-point game in 1962.

Vogel was middle-aged during that famous game.

He turned 99 on Feb. 2.

"It's a funny feeling," Vogel said of celebrating his birthday. "You're glad you're still around. But then you say, 'I'm due to go.' It wouldn't bother me. I had a full life. What more are you going to do?" He may do fewer interviews now and is thinking about retiring from that volunteer position altogether. But Vogel still does plenty.

He is "that guy" everybody knows: At Penn's Table restaurant in downtown West Chester, where waitresses and young ladies lavish him with attention and leave lipstick on his collar. At the YMCA in West Chester, where he is the oldest active member and has his own parking space. And, of course, at the 55-and-older community where he lives and works at the TV station.

Vogel treats everyone like a best friend during his interviews, said station president Don Trauger.

"It's like sitting in your living room, and you have a friend with you, and you're just chatting back and forth," he said.

Vogel, a man with relatively smooth skin and a full head of hair that has not yet turned entirely white, said he doesn't much care for the shows on TV now. He would rather watch reruns of M\*A\*S\*H, Hogan's Heroes, The Andy Griffith Show, and Cheers.

Vogel and about 40 other resident volunteers run the Hershey's Mill TV studio, a professional-looking operation just inside the community's main gates. The station has sets, backdrops, props, and lighting.

A few years ago, the studio produced a soap opera murder-mystery starring seniors that Vogel said was "so corny it was funny." Vogel got an invitation to appear. He declined.

"I didn't have any part in that," he said with a laugh.

Richard "Buck" Patterson, who also lives in Hershey's Mill, was surprised to hear his friend was 99.

"He's the most active, alert person his age," Patterson, 83, said. "He's a gentleman's gentleman and a person you like the minute you meet him."

A state Senate citation last month called Vogel "an outstanding citizen who exemplifies the finest virtues of American life."

Vogel, who grew up in Caldwell, N.J., is one of Bucknell University's oldest alumni: Class of 1937. And he is still treasurer of Meals on Wheels of Chester County after driving for the agency more than 20 years.

He recently stopped lifting weights at the YMCA, but he still walks the track.

Vogel got his own parking space at the Y in 2010, along with a healthy living award, and every day he parks his



red 2009 Jaguar XJ in that space.

"I like to drive in comfort in my old age," he said, adding that he had done well as a salesman.

Vogel and his wife, Virginia, settled in this area to be close to their daughters, JoAnne "Joey" Bement and Lynne Cox, and they moved from Villanova to Hershey's Mill in 1988.

Once known as a handyman around the house, Vogel has started to realize his limitations. He moves slower now, wears glasses, and has a pacemaker.

"When you're in your 100th year, it gets pretty tough," he said.

When he walks, he shuffles a bit. But his back is relatively straight, and he does not use a cane. His fingers no longer bend the right way to play the ukulele, so he plays the organ.

Every day, he treats himself to chocolate. At night, he has a drink of vodka with some gin for flavor.

He has been going to Penn's Table every day for breakfast since his wife of almost 71 years died of cancer in 2011. But he rarely eats alone.

Workers at Penn's Table say Vogel will now eat free for the rest of his life. The restaurant, the West Chester YMCA, and the Philadelphia Country Club, where Vogel has been a member for more than 50 years, all held birthday parties for him. "He's a real treasure to our community," Trauger said. "And, of course, to our station."  
mbond@philly.com 610-313-8207 @MichaelleBond



Charlie Vogel with souvenirs he and his late wife, Virginia, collected. He's interviewed Charlie Manuel, Bill Campbell, and Cecily Tynan.





Charlie Vogel at home. "When you're in your 100th year, it gets pretty tough," he says. MEAGHAN POGUE / Staff Photographer