

Pearl Harbor survivor a deserving guest of honor

Given the regularity of charity golf tournaments, you might think Dennis Buden would be wary of the tournament he's heading up Oct. 2 at Farmington's Tunxis

BUSINESS SCENE



Scott Whipple

Plantation Country Club. Think again. From what I can glean about the sixth annual Golden Kielbasa Veterans Open, he has little to worry about. The event, presented by Farmington Bank and hosted by the Disabled American Veterans, Hardware City Chapter 8, is Central Connecticut's largest and most renowned veterans' charity golf tournament. In addition to the DAV, major beneficiaries include House of Heroes Connecticut and Friends of Fisher House Connecticut. Additional major sponsors include Stanley Black & Decker, the Starlight Program at Stonington Institute, AT&T Connecticut, the Tomasso Group, Okay Industries, the Hospital of Central Connecticut and the Creed Law Firm.

More than 140 golfers are expected to tee it up at Tunxis,

with a post-golf barbecue, raffle and awards presentation. But, what sets this tournament apart is that 94-year-old Bristol resident Ed Riccio Jr. will be guest of honor. Other central Connecticut veterans will also be honored in the Tunxis Pavilion.

FDR called Dec. 7, 1941, "a date which will live in infamy." For Riccio, who was there, that date has become a searing memory.

It's not the Japanese Zeroes strafing overhead, the widespread chaos or smoldering ruins of U.S. battleships in Pearl Harbor that Ed remembers best. It's being part of the detail that, after the attack had ended, tended to the casualties — the torched, lifeless bodies of barracks comrades.

"These were guys I knew, guys I bunked with, guys I played ball with," Riccio told Buden. Riccio was one of only three of 60 men in his barracks to survive the devastating attack that catapulted the United States into World War II. "We were picking up body parts. I recognized their tattoos. I remember picking up someone's arm; on it was the wristwatch of my good friend; tears streamed down our faces as we worked." Later in the war, Riccio, as an Army Air Corps mechanic and turret gunner aboard the "Calamity Jane," a B-17, escaped death. He was



Ed Riccio Jr., seen here in 1941, will be guest of honor at the Golden Kielbasa Veterans Open on Oct. 2.

forced to land the Flying Fortress with no flight training after it took a fatal hit that killed the pilot and co-pilot.

After the war, with flight school training, Riccio piloted a private air cargo carrier, owned Ed's Amoco in Bristol, providing auto repair services to those who couldn't afford to pay; later, he worked as an engine mechanic for Pratt and Whitney.

Ed, the son of Italian immigrants Ed and Angela Riccio, is the youngest and lone survivor of a family of 10 brothers and sisters. His brother, Dan was a local sheriff; brother, Joe owned a popular shoe store in Bristol; sister, Romilda was also a shoe store owner in the Riccio Block on



Ed Riccio Jr. narrowly avoided death twice during World War II, first at Pearl Harbor and later as a turret gunner who had to land this B-17 after Japanese fire crippled the plane and killed its pilot and co-pilot.

North Main Street. Sister Claire was a school teacher.

Ed and his long-time wife, Theresa have a daughter and son-in-law, JoAnn and Steve Larson; two sons, Eddie and Mark and three grandchildren.

For information about sponsorships and foursome availability for the open, contact Tournament Director Dennis Buden at dennis@goldenkielbasa.org or (860) 558-0514, or visit www.goldenkielbasa.org.

"You don't even need to be a golfer," Buden says. "Come to honor Ed."

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