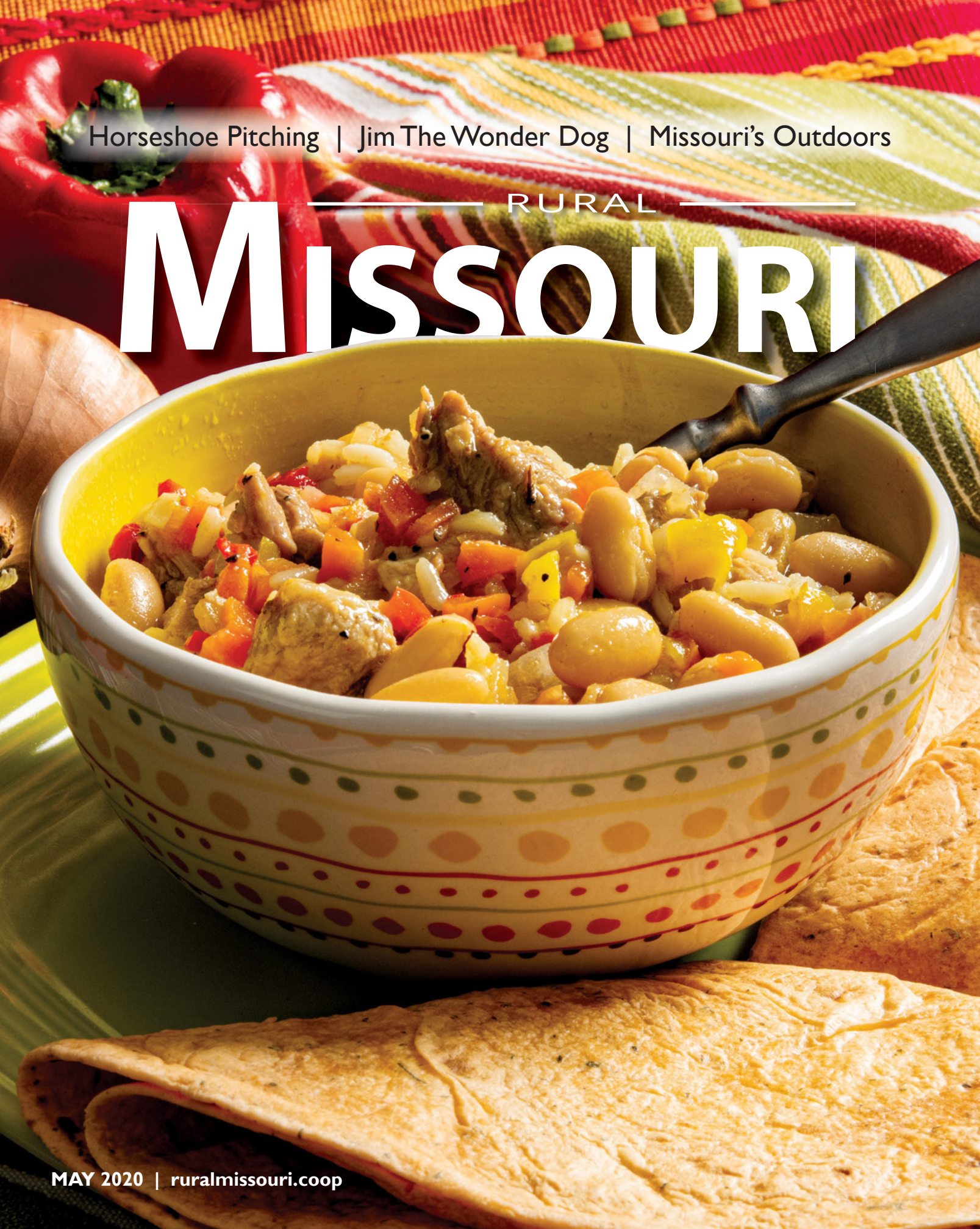


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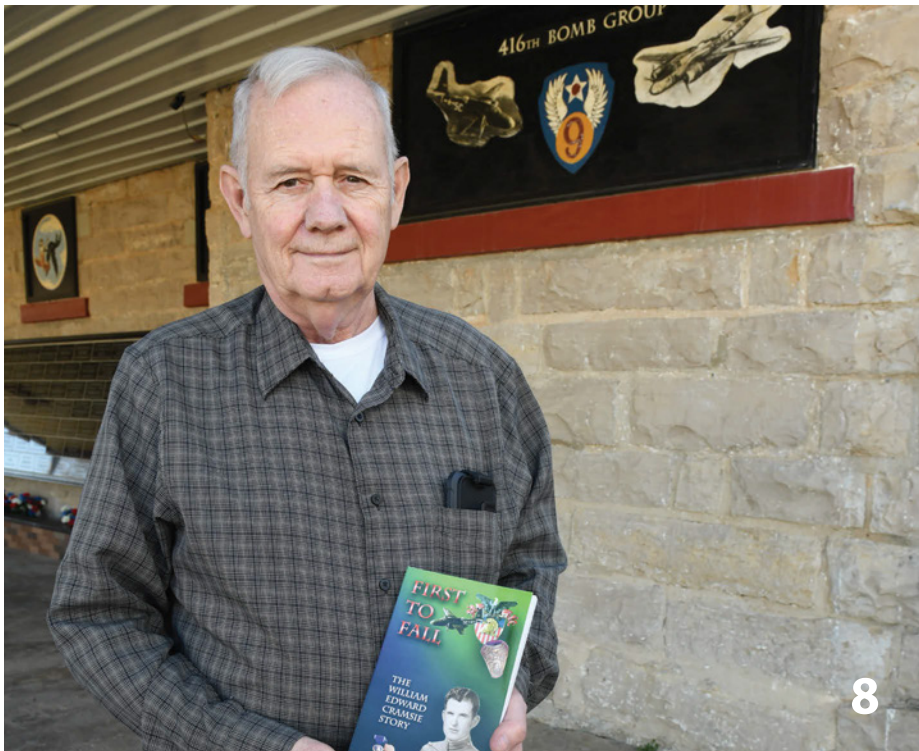


CONTENTS

Volume 73

MAY 2020

Number 5



8

8 The ring and the wings

One couple's journey to preserve WWII history

14 Cool costs this summer

See savings through energy efficiency upgrades

19 Close counts

Horseshoes is a sport for all seasons

28 A dog named Jim

Jim the Wonder Dog wowed skeptics with his intelligence

40 The outdoors are still open

Enjoying Missouri's natural beauty

44 Focused on safety

Cooperative organizations double down on safety



19



28

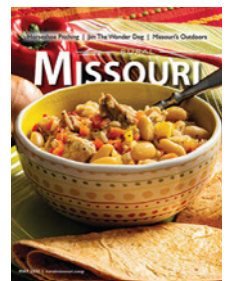
photo courtesy Friends of Jim the Wonder Dog

IN EVERY ISSUE

- 4 Cooperation
- 5 Perspectives
- 24 Community
- 34 Recipes
- 40 Outdoors
- 46 Events
- 48 Neighbors
- 50 Just4Kids

ON THE COVER

Join us as we celebrate a Mexican fiesta of flavors this month in our recipe section. A recipe for Pork Chile Verde, a delicious and hearty recipe as shown here, can be found on page 34.



The class ring of William Edward Cramsie set a Gainesville couple on the path to preserve the history of the 416th Bomb Group.



THE RING AND THE WINGS



Wayne and Doris Sayles oversee the 416th Bomb Group Archive in downtown Gainesville. A resource for authors, researchers and school children alike, the archive preserves a specific piece of World War II history through documents, photographs, exhibits and hours of veteran interviews.

One couple's journey to preserve WWII history

by Zach Smith | zsmith@ruralmissouri.coop

It all started with a pawn shop ring, a ring which Wayne Sayles didn't even want. "I went to put it back in the box and it wouldn't go from my hand to the box — it stopped right there," Wayne says, mimicking the act. "I came back the next day, same thing. I couldn't do it."

That was all it took. Little did Wayne know that gold ring, with a red stone bearing the words "West Point — 1943" and sent to him by a friend from California, would change the course of his life.

The journey that it started would lead him and his wife, Doris, to establish the 416th Bomb Group Archive in Gainesville. The nonprofit repository preserves the history of the veterans who served in the 416th through countless records, letters, artifacts, photographs and video interviews of World War II servicemen.

Inscribed inside the band, Wayne found: "William Edward Cramsie, Class of 1943." Intrigued, the art

historian and retired Air Force captain made a cursory search of Cramsie's name online and found no joy. "You don't get zero hits on Google very often," Wayne adds.

Still, he could not let go, and Wayne followed his nose for ferreting out facts. He and Doris followed clue after clue. These eventually led the White River Valley Electric Cooperative members to two living 416th veterans, Tulsa Ray Jones and Missouri resident Bob Basnett, as well as the bomb group's 2006 reunion in Louisville, Kentucky.

"They stick together because they were the greatest generation," says Doris. "You should have heard those men. They picked up right where they left off. They were the happiest people you've ever seen."

As Wayne conducted research for a biography on Cramsie, "First to Fall: The William Edward Cramsie Story," he and Doris continued to make the annual reunion trip. At the 2010 meeting in Branson, one late veteran's wife mentioned she had no family to whom she could leave the things her husband had saved from his



Top: A collection of more than 300 letters from Lt. Harold "Dave" Andrews to his future wife Jackie pays tribute to love during wartime. Andrews' family also donated a pendant — which the officer made for his sweetheart from his pilot's wings — to the archive. **Bottom:** The archive and Wall of Honor are hard to miss on a drive through downtown. It is located in the former Gainesville City Hall.



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days in the service. Wayne and Doris offered to take them until the group came up with a better solution.

"Museums didn't want it because they are full of World War II material. They can't store it, they have so much," Wayne says. "It's a problem on a broader scale for that group. As the years go by, there are more and more people in that boat."

The solution arrived in the form of the archive building — the old Gainesville City Hall, which came up for sale later that year. Serendipity seemed to be taking care of the 416th's hallowed history and appointing the Sayleses as its keepers, according to Wayne. "This wasn't all out of curiosity," he adds. "We were driven by something very powerful."

Finding the veterans, hearing their stories and preserving their war-time artifacts was only half the battle. In order to create a truly useable archive, Wayne and a group of dedicated volunteers took on the painstaking and monumental task of turning hundreds of personnel records, load lists and aerial photographs into completely detailed breakdowns of each of the bomb group's 285 missions. All of the information is freely available online. The husband-and-wife duo are currently at work cataloguing all of the items in the archive's inventory so that a search of any member of the 416th will show users all of the artifacts, from matchbook covers to medals, associated with that particular veteran.

Although it's not a museum, the archive does have a few displays, including West Point uniforms, pieces of debris from German flak guns and aircraft wreckage, and more than 300 love letters from the late 1st Lt. Harold "Dave" Andrews to his wife-to-be, Jackie. The archive has proven to be a hit with researchers and authors, as well as younger generations who are just beginning to learn the history of the war.

While heavy bombers such as the B-17 and B-24 focused on industrial sites, the smaller,





A display at the entrance to the archive puts visitors in the time period of the 416th. Behind the West Point uniform, Wayne points out the Cramsie family's Service flag. The blue star represents William's brother, Robert, who also was on active duty during the war. The gold star recognizes that William was killed in battle following the attack on a V-1 launch area at Bois de Huit Rues.

faster planes such as the Douglas A-20 Havoc flown by the 416th focused on destroying launch sites for Germany's V-1 flying bomb — one of the earliest cruise missiles — which was wreaking havoc on England. Following the Allied Forces' landing at Normandy, the four squadrons were then tasked with attacking German military units and bridges.

On April 10, 1944, less than a year after his graduation and less than two months before D-Day, Cramsie took his last flight. Cloud cover over the V-1 launch area at Bois de Huit Rues made identifying the bomb site difficult, and Cramsie's A-20 was hit by flak from German 88-millimeter cannons during both passes. As the squadron returned home across the English Channel, other pilots reported seeing Cramsie losing altitude before he disappeared down into the clouds. The pilot managed to send out a request for rescue, but a transposed coordinate meant that help never arrived. To this day, the search for Cramsie's plane in Bradwell Bay continues.

Wayne would later determine that Cramsie gave the ring

to his mother sometime before he shipped out overseas. After the war, she gave it to his brother Robert, also a WWII veteran. How the ring ended up in a West Coast pawn shop and later in Wayne and Doris' mailbox remains a mystery. What it led to, however, is preserved in great detail at the Gainesville archive. Only a handful of the bomb group's veterans still make it to the reunions and there are fewer every year. That's where the archive can serve as a vehicle for honoring them and their brave deeds during a difficult time, says Wayne.

"The documents themselves, while irreplaceable, are not the only purpose for the archive's existence," Wayne says. "What is most meaningful is what those veterans did and preserving that memory."



The 416th Bomb Group Archive is located at 52 Fourth St. in Gainesville and is open by appointment. Contact the archive at 417-499-9831 or archive@416th.com. You can visit the archive online at www.416th.com and follow them on Facebook at www.facebook.com/416th.