



Media Release

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Venango Area Chamber of Commerce

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For Immediate Release

Dr. Robert Pilewski has been named the Venango Area Chamber of Commerce 2008 Citizen of the Year, and will be recognized at the Chamber's Annual Dinner to be held February 18th at Cross Creek Resort. A native of Venango County, Dr Pilewski was born and raised in Oil City. After service in the U.S. Navy, He pursued a degree in biology and chemistry at Gannon University, continued to medical school at Jefferson Medical College in Philadelphia, to an internship and residency at the Health Center Hospitals at the University of Pittsburgh, and a fellowship in clinical pharmacology at University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine. He returned to Oil City in 1969 to begin his practice as an internist, in private practice until his retirement 2002. In addition to his practice, he also taught at the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine and later in the physical therapy assistant program at the University of Pittsburgh at Titusville, where he continues to teach.

As a physician Robert was known for his caring and compassion, but his commitment to his patients extended far beyond his scheduled hours. He continues even in his retirement to follow his patients, often visiting them at the hospital or nursing homes years after he was their physician.

Dr. Pilewski's contributions to the community are many and include his involvement with Venango Video, teaching at the Venango Catholic High School and his extensive work with local Stroke and Bereavement support groups.

Community members are likely to recognize Dr. Pilewski from his long time appearance in Venango Video's "Stethoscope", which aired locally from 1985 until 2007. He explains that the show aimed to provide important health related issues while highlighting local "experts". "I would try to choose topics of relevance, what I thought the community might be interested in," he said. "They were often hot topics in the media at the time. And then I would chose an expert and have them come in and talk about it."

A longtime Venango Video board member, Pilewski described the local access station as “an important community asset.” He volunteered as a regular host at the semi-annual Venango Video Auction for more than 20 years.

During a 1986 procedure to repair Dr Pilewski’s heart valve, he suffered a stroke. Not one to surrender easily to such a disability, he immediately began working toward recovery. In addition to his dedication to continue his medical practice, he draws particular attention with his regular golf game. He relays the story of an invitation to a golf clinic in April of ’86 following his release from Harmarville Rehabilitation Center that came with the promise that the golf pro would demonstrate how he could rejoin the game. Not only did he find that he could enjoy golf again, but he also discovered that with some practice he could consistently hit the ball straight. Bob continues to golf twice a week, during the better part of the year spent in Venango County and during the months he winters in Florida.

In addition to medical matters, Pilewski is also an eager commentator on the game of golf. A one-armed golfer since his stroke, he said “life became 50 percent simpler” when he removed one hand from the golf club.

“I give golf advice to anybody willing to come out and endure me,” he said with a laugh.

In 2001, Dr Pilewski approached Father John Malthaner, headmaster at Venango Catholic High School with a suggestion to add a class in Anatomy and physiology to the schools curriculum, with the offer to teach the class, pro bono. The class provides a distinct advantage to local students and has given great pleasure to the teacher as he has witnessed several students pursue careers in the health care.

In 2002, at the request of former Visiting Nurses Association director Ruthanne Nerlich, Dr. Pilewski began working with the VNA to lead a Stroke Support group. The group of about 10 to 20 people meets monthly in Rocky Grove, he said.

It was in St. Petersburg, Florida, where he and his wife Angie spend winters that he first became involved in a bereavement support group. In the church bulletin was a call for “volunteers with big ears.” “That’s exactly what people in that arena need, people willing to listen and listen and listen,” he said. Upon his return to PA he recognized the need for a bereavement support group in our area, which he started in 2005, two years into his work with the Florida group.

Dr. Pilewski notes that his involvement with these two groups has been the most gratifying of his volunteer work.

“I think we fulfill a need that in many circumstances has been underappreciated or we have been unaware of until recent years,” he said.

“Volunteerism is grossly under-appreciated on the scale of self-satisfying occupations,” he said.

“Being able to work for the betterment of others is important,” he said. “As I’ve matured, that’s become an even more obvious fact of life.”

Dr. Pilewski and his wife Angeline are the parents of 4 children, Joseph, Thomas, Robert Jr. and Julie and the grandparents of eleven grandchildren.