

THE TWO RIVER TIMES

## SCENE

THE WEEK OF JUNE 15 - 22, 2017



## LIFESTYLES

When The  
Big Top Hits  
The Water

Page 16

## EDUCATION

Red Bank Students  
Benefit From  
First Lady's Book  
Donation

Page 20

# Norman Peer

## *Father For All Times*

**N**orman and Joan Peer and their five children lived in a big house on Holly Drive in Little Silver overlooking Little Silver Creek where they could go crabbing and fishing with the family dog in tow.

Vacations consisted of piling the family into the car and renting a cabin for two weeks in Maine or New Hampshire or Martha's Vineyard.

The kids went to Catholic schools and Norman Peer commuted to Manhattan where he worked as a lawyer handling mostly corporate and securities matters for a firm with offices at 1 Wall Street and 30 Rockefeller Center, where he could see the Christmas tree from his 22nd floor office.

Then, one day, Joan Peer told her husband she was bored sitting on committees. She wanted more out of life. She had seen a poster with the image of a little girl with tears running down her face.

"Would you take me home?" were the words on the poster. "Yes I would," Joan Peer thought.

And that's how the Peers ended up fostering 35 local children (adopting two, Jenifer and her twin brother Justin, who has since passed away). Many of the children were referred by DYFS (Division of Youth and Family Services, now called the Division of Child Protection and Permanency.)

Norman Peer grew up in East Orange and spent summers at the family cottage in Atlantic Highlands. He was the fourth of five children.

"My parents were older and they doted on us," he said. "We had a wonderful, modest, middle-class life."

He attended Lady Help of Christians School in East Orange, then Seton Hall Preparatory School in West Orange, where he also played football.

"I got a scholarship to a small college in Vermont, but my Dad said I was too small and I'd get killed," Norman Peer explained. "He said, 'Your brother is going to Villanova. What's wrong with that?' And the conversation was over."

A good thing, too, because that's where he met his future wife.

At the time Villanova University was all-male, and nearby Rosemont College was all-female.

"He called to ask my roommate out on a date, but she was busy," Joan Peer explains. "She told him that I wasn't."

They've been married for 55 years this December.

"I guess we found true love, and I'm still very much in love with her," Norman Peer said. "It's the best thing I ever did. She straightened me out ... she likes to say that," he adds with a grin during an interview at the Freehold law offices of Lomurro, Munson, Comer, Brown & Schottland, LLC, where, now 80, he works five days a week.

And the longevity part?

"I attribute that to my wife, too. She's very bright. We do a lot of things together, but not continually. Also, I think raising the kids together helped."

And what does Joan think?

"He's fun to be with and tells great stories – some sad, some outrageous," she said. "We looked forward to him coming home after work."

Besides offering shelter and support to abused and neglected children, Joan Peer also joined the Little Silver First Aid Squad and took Emergency Medical Technician training. Later she worked as a social worker with the Mental Health Association of Monmouth County helping families in distress.

While some children might not like sharing their home and parents with strangers, the five Peer children – Andy, Kevin, Jennifer, Mollie and Sheila – embraced it. Andy, the eldest, said children sometimes would be dropped off at night, scared, sometimes bleeding. They might stay 24 hours or a month.

"It was fine, we had a big house," he said. "We let them know they were in a safe place. We'd watch TV together, play with the dog."

Now an equity trader on Wall Street, Andy Peer lives in Berkeley Heights with his wife and four children. He said the experience helped him realize bad things were happening behind closed doors in towns near to where he lived.

"I tell my kids to reach out when they see someone in need, bring kids being bullied into the fold," he said. "It's easy to help quickly, just talk."

Talking to people and helping children is important to Norman Peer. In 1997 he was appointed to be a judge to the Superior Court of New Jersey,

Freehold, and served until 2006 when he reached the mandatory retirement age of 70. (He previously served as a Municipal Court judge in Atlantic Highlands from 1972-1988, while a partner in several New Jersey law firms.)

"I wanted to work in the family court, to work with children," he said. "The last four years in Superior Court I was in charge of the DYFS cases, which concerned abuse, neglect, termination of parental rights, domestic violence, divorces. That could be tough.

"I did a lot of counseling in that phase of my life," he said. "The people I dealt with tended to be poor and had problems, like not having enough money to pay the rent.

"I got to like a lot of them. I felt for them and their problems and I was in a position to do something about it."

But he doesn't think too many things have changed for the better and the opioid epidemic is making things worse.

"Jail doesn't help that many people," he said. "I believe more in rehabilitation."

He remains a trustee for CPC Behavioral Healthcare and an advisor to the Foster and Adoptive Family Services.

He tried retiring, "But how much golf can you play?" he asked.

When Donald Lomurro, managing partner of Lomurro, Munson, Comer, Brown & Schottland, LLC, specializing in personal injury, medical malpractice and family law, asked him to join the firm nine years ago, he accepted.

"He is a very smart, pleasant, uplifting person whose door is always open and he knows everyone's name," Lomurro said. "He is a genuine resource. Someone you look to with deference and respect. He makes everyone feel important."

But he can be a bit self-deprecating.

"There are some young lawyers here who think because I was a judge I'm smarter than I really am," he joked. "They'll come into my office seeking advice and I like that."

He specializes in mediation – convincing clients to solve their differences to avoid a costly and lengthy court battle. He also presides over in-house mock cases that help prepare clients for court.

"Everyone here insists on calling me 'Judge,'" he said. "It was a privilege being a judge. I liked it a lot."

Peer was forced to slow down a tad when he had open heart surgery at 75. His doctor insisted he give

up playing goalie for his ice hockey teams. (Yes, you read that right.)

The Navesink Country Club, where he was a member for 37 years, had an outdoor rink where his sons learned to play. He asked about an adult team and learned there was none because no one could play goalie. So, at age 40, he learned how and played in tournaments for both the club and the Red Bank Armory.

"We went all over, including Lake Placid, and I loved it," he said, "I still get calls asking if I can play in a game, but my doctor said, 'Don't do that anymore. You'll get bruised.' But I feel great."

He mostly gets his exercise at the gym at Shadow Lake Village in Middletown where he and Joan now live.

"I'm very satisfied with the children and how they stay close to each other," he said. "I talk to them all the time." (Kevin has passed away). And in between visits he and his wife follow their 14 grandchildren on social media.

"I've had a very interesting life," he said. "To sum it up, I always liked what I did."

BY GRETCHEN C. VAN BENTHUYSEN

DANNY SANCHEZ

