

Shelby Co Herald  
20 May

## VanHouten Lauded for Strong Support of Gideons

By Troy Treasure

James VanHouten of rural Clarence has seen a lot in 101-plus years.

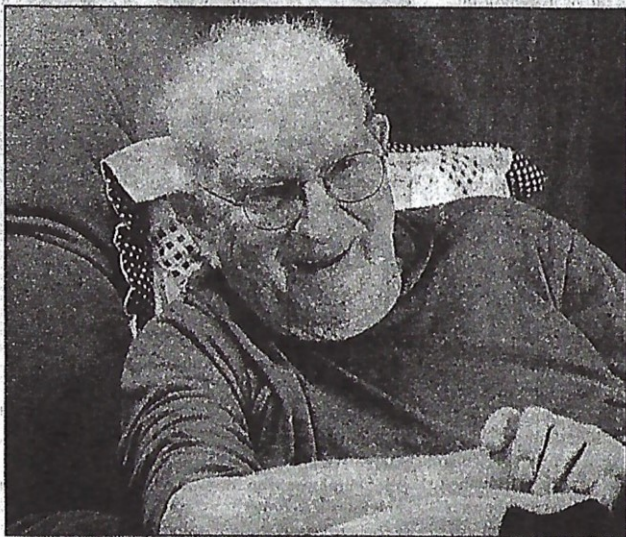
One of the best decisions VanHouten believes he ever made was joining Gideons International on April 23, 1998 ... just two months before he turned 80.

"That's an organization that spreads God's word putting Bibles in motel rooms and New Testaments to children at the schools," he said. "I don't make any secrets that I believe. Jesus Christ is my Lord.

"Anything that pertained to the Lord's work, I'm interested in."

VanHouten credited the late Eli Otto for guiding him to the global evangelical Christian group. His first meeting was just down the road in Paris.

Eli Otto's son, Roger, is current president of the Shelbyna Camp of Gideons International. Roger Otto recalled a recent conversation he had with fellow member Hurley Schwieter about



James VanHouten smiles while talking to guests on Friday, May 15 at his home south of Clarence. Photo by Marlana Smith

VanHouten.

"He said, primarily, he remembered the first meeting, they gave James a job and he just took it and ran with it," Roger Otto said.

The role was church coordinator. VanHouten contacted pastors to arrange partnerships to spread the Gideons' ministry. He was also in charge of providing qualified guest speakers.

VanHouten is a voracious reader these days, including the Bible on a daily basis. But his reading interests vary.

Next to him recently was a copy of *UNBROKEN: A World War*

*II Story of Survival, Resilience, and Redemption* by author Laura Hillenbrand. Brother Richard Todd of Hannibal loaned him the book.

*UNBROKEN* is the story of Louie Zamperini, a war veteran who drifted in the Pacific Ocean for 47 days; then captured and tortured by the Japanese. Zamperini later became an evangelist. He died in 2014.

Born north of Clarence in 1918 to Ralph and Opal VanHouten, James moved as a one-year-old with his family to their current property south of town. A decade later, the stock market collapsed. James

recalled his parents decided to give up their farm to its lending company.

"Mr. Smith said, 'Now Mr. VanHouten, we don't want to do that. We've got more land on our plates than we can handle,' James said. "He encouraged Dad to hold on for a while.

"Things got better, eventually paid for the place and it was ours."

In 1936, James traveled to Hannibal for the opening of the original Mark Twain Memorial Bridge. President Franklin Roosevelt was present to dedicate the structure.

"Didn't think much about it at the time but I look back on it, it was a mark in history," he said. "Oh, my gosh. That was a big deal to have the President there."

By the outbreak of World War II, James and his late wife, Florence, already had three of what would turn out to be four children. James stated he attempted to enlist

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# THE EDITOR

been asked to postpone our annual garage week in August, beginning on Preview, \$1.00 admission, continuing on Friday, August 7 at noon at the Center starting on Sunday afternoon. We hope to see everyone then, we will

## Health Department to Hold Events

Shelby County Health Department will be exercise events throughout the month of through the beginning of July for children to

children get done doing exercises, they will get smoothies using the smoothie bike.

On 1, 3, 8 and 11 the SCHD will be at Park in Shelbyville at 9:30 a.m.

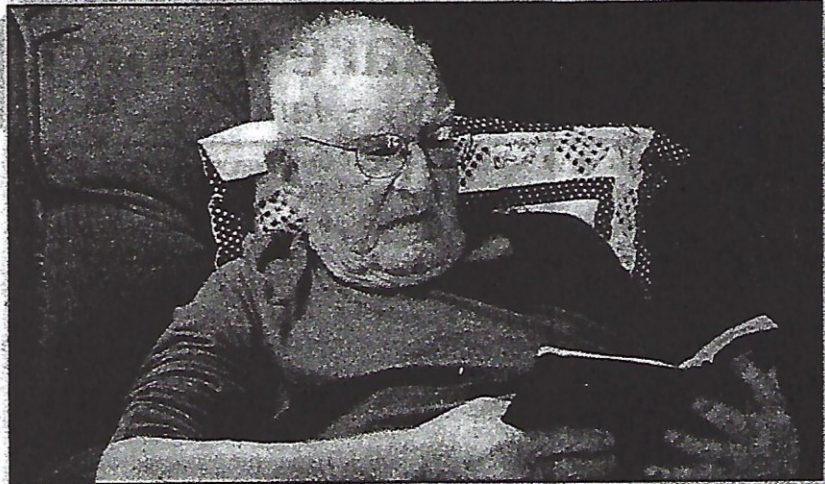
HD will be in Shelbina at the pool park 15, 17, 22 and 24 at 9:30 a.m.

Finish up in Clarence at the north park near railroad tracks on June 29, July 1, 6 9:30 a.m.

THANK YOU FOR READING THE SHELBY COUNTY HERALD!  
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of Bark Mulch..... \$21.00  
Red/Brown..... \$24.00

PERENNIALS.



James enjoys reading his Bible. Photo by Marlana Smith

## VANHOUTEN CONTINUED FROM FRONT

in the armed forces but received a deferment due his occupation being deemed essential.

"They said we need you to be a farmer, so it was an open-and-shut case," James said.

The 1975 tornado that struck Macon and Shelby Counties is, to this day, fresh in his mind as if it happened yesterday. The twister destroyed almost all outbuildings on the property and damaged the house James still lives in.

The tornado occurred

on the evening of April 23, exactly 23 years prior ... to the date ... of James joining Gideons International.

An article in the April 30, 1975 edition of the Shelby County Herald described the scene:

"A wooded area east of the house was a mass of broken snags. Metal roofing flapped high in the bare branches."

By that time, James had switched careers. Turning over operation of the farm to his father and son, Neal, he became a land improvement contractor. James enjoyed operating bulldozers and scrapers

while constructing such things as terraces and ponds.

James and Florence were married in 1938 at Eminence, Missouri. In addition to Neal, they have three daughters: Joy, Karen and Kathy.

"As recently as last fall, he drove a tractor.

Roger Otto believes Psalm 91:16 applies to a man who will turn 102 next month.

"There's a promise there that a person who has an intimate relationship with the Lord is promised a long life," he said. "That's how I would describe James VanHouten."

## Read to Succeed

Go Outside to Read and Play

