



Gazette photo by James Woodcock

Hart Glumbik plays a song on his electronic piano at the Community Center on the South Side of Billings. The 87-year-old RSVP volunteer travels throughout the area entertaining senior citizen audiences.

# TICKLING the IVORIES

## Seniors delight in piano man's melodies

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**I**T'S THURSDAY afternoon at the Glenden Nursing Home in Lockwood.

The winter sun fills the festive dining room, where the tables are covered in silver cellophane. A Christmas tree stands in the corner. The light dancing on the cellophane creates a dappled effect on the brown carpet.

About 20 residents of the nursing home are gathered in the room, sitting in recliners with their legs wrapped in colorful afghans or sipping coffee at one of the tables. Some are bent with osteoporosis or hooked up to machines.

The residents are immersed in their own quiet thoughts and memories. Their heads, though, are turned toward the southwest corner of the room, where piano player Hart Glumbik puts music to their memories — and a tap in their toes.

"I'm gonna put my cheaters on so I can see better," Glumbik says, breaking a moment to don his glasses. "It would help a little bit, wouldn't it?"

Punching a few buttons, he programs his portable Casio electronic piano with a bouncy percussion rhythm to accompany his playing as he escorts his audience through a "Winter Wonderland." A woman visiting a friend at the home takes a seat at Glumbik's side and sings along to the chorus.

Glumbik, 87, is a member of the Retired Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP). As his service to the community, he plays his electronic piano in places where senior

citizens gather or live, such as nursing homes, retirement centers and the Billings Community Center.

Glumbik also has a regular gig around noon on Saturdays and Sundays at the Kit Kat Cafe in the Billings Heights, and he's been called upon to play for the Elks Club on occasion.

With a repertoire of about 200 songs ranging from country/western to the "ooooold-fashioned" melodies and hymns, Glumbik performs for about a hour 15 to 20 times a week.

"People come and just smile and thank me," he said. "It makes you feel all right ... You're doing something which people like." And he likes it, too, though he said he "hates to practice."

With the exception of a few missed notes — mostly because he lost three fingers on his right hand in 1940 — practice doesn't appear to be necessary for Glumbik. He's been playing harmonic instruments since he was 10 and has developed a sensitive ear.

He took up the piano only seven years ago.

Glumbik, a German immigrant who arrived in Chicago in 1926, had taken a few violin lessons in his homeland until World War I depleted his family's finances. He continued with the instrument, however, and took up the accordion.

Glumbik came to the United States as a tool and die maker and immediately landed a job with International Harvester, a tractor manufacturer. During the installation of a new piece of equipment, a fellow worker caused the machine to slip and cut the fingers on Glumbik's right hand.

"They were just nicked, but in those days

they just cut them off," he said. Glumbik worked about 10 hours that day with only a handkerchief wrapped around his fingers.

Glumbik moved to Lodge Grass in 1948 so his wife, Marion, could be close to her sister. For two years he shared a business, Don's Farm Service, with his brother-in-law, then operated his own business, Hart's Plumbing and Heating, from 1950 to 1972.

Glumbik then moved to Joliet, where he played the accordion for the Joliet Kitchen Band. When the piano player for the band died, Glumbik volunteered to sit in and play chords.

Glumbik moved to Billings in 1990 to be near his wife, who — having developed Alzheimer's disease — he had admitted to St. John's Lutheran Home. She died about six months later.

Being a self-taught piano player, Glumbik said he prefers his Casio, which comes equipped with computerized beat and tone "banks." Each bank has 100 different options in rhythm and sound.

Glumbik, who has arthritis in his left-hand knuckles, only has to provide the basic notes in the song and an occasional lower chord. He can also program the machine's memory to repeat a melody while he stands up to dance with someone.

"You can do so many things with (this piano), it gives you more courage to play," Glumbik said. "I think this thing does everything but write its name."

As a Glenden attendant makes his last rounds with the snack cart and one tired resident sinks in her chair, Glumbik wraps up the afternoon concert with a familiar tune.

"... 'Til we meet again! ... Thank, you!"