Brothers' service to be honored during Marbletown Parade

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MARBLETOWN — Gary Strayer was looking forward to being the parade grand marshal for this year's Marbletown Festival but he passed away May 19. Now, his wife, Helen; his brother, Michael; and his sister, Marilyn Louth, will ride in the parade in honor of him and his family.

The Strayer brothers, Michael of Delphos, Ronald of Denver, Colo., and the late Gary and Gale, all served in the military making them a perfect fit for this year's Marbletown Festival theme, "To those who served." Michael will act as the Marbletown Festival Parade Grand Marshal in honor of his and his brothers' service.

Gary was chosen as the parade grand marshal last year and Helen said after growing up in Marbletown, he loved the people and felt honored for being chosen.

"There wasn't anyone that didn't like him," Helen said. "He was a really fun-loving guy and I know he really was looking forward to being in the parade."

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Gary graduated from Jefferson High School in 1961. He served in the military for 28 years, serving in the Ohio Army National Guard from 1964-82 and the U.S. Army (AGR) tour from 1982-93. He retired as a Sergeant First Class from the U.S. Army and then worked as a correctional officer for the Allen Correctional Institution in Lima for 12 years.

When he worked full-time for the Army, he was a training sergeant. He would learn new techniques at different Army bases and come back to train the area recruits.

"He enjoyed working with the young people," she said.

Helen recalled a time when Gary went to training with 20-year-olds and he was the oldest man in the group.

"It was impressive that he kept up with them," she said. "They always put him in the front of the line to show that the older guy was out there doing it, so the younger guys knew they could, too."

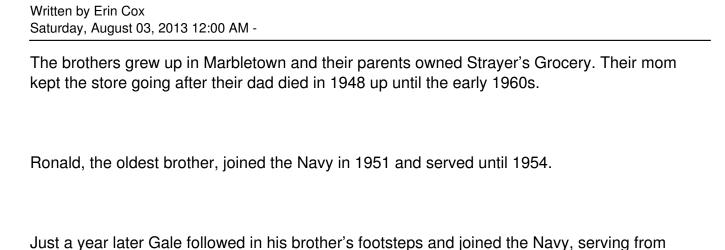
When Gary died in May, a handful of Army officers spoke at his funeral.

"He was pretty popular and good at his job," Helen said.

Helen feels honored that she gets to ride in the parade to share Gary's memory and honor the service of the other Strayer brothers with the rest of Marbletown.

"It means a lot to me to be able to ride in his place," Helen said. "I know he wanted to be here."

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Michael was drafted into the military right out of high school in 1967 during the Vietnam War. He spent two years in the Army and received two bronze stars and the Purple Heart.

"I did the best I could," Michael said.

1952-1956.

Michael, who still lives in Marbletown, agreed to take on the role as parade grand marshal as a tribute.

"I'm honored to do this as a tribute to my brothers' service and I'm especially honored to do it for my two brothers who have passed away," Michael said.