



Fred Rosenzweig digs up dwarf irises outside his Monroe home. (Jana Alexander photo)

By Jana Alexander

Fred Rosenzweig kneels before a hosta, one of his newest gardening experiments. The edges of his Monroe yard are carefully arranged with Astillby, Fuschia and Dwarf Iris, as well as a host of other flowers that lap up to surround walkways and line the feet of a wooden fence.

Autumn is approaching and the fall crocuses are up. Rosenzweig will tell you that they come up twice per year. It's once in spring and again in the fall when the leafless lavender spike their petals from the soil.

Rosenzweig is legally blind.

"Legally blind is when all you can read on the chart is the big 'e.' That's 200/20," he explained.

He retired from his position as an Internal Revenue Service accountant in 1972. "When my eyesight got to the point (that) I couldn't keep working," Rosenzweig said.

Rosenzweig was born in 1918, and grew up in the now-growing town of Monroe. When he turned 24, he went to "the big war," World War II. He volunteered for the Army Air Corps, a branch of military service that changed to the Air Force in 1947. Rosenzweig went through the cadet program in 1943, and got his wings in 1944. In September of 1944, while fall crocuses were popping up in Monroe, Rosenzweig was flying B17s overseas.

Rosenzweig flew 35 missions in World War II; his final one was on March 17, 1945.

He was stationed in Dayton, Ohio for the last nine months of military service. It was there that exposure to spores from bat guano in Dayton, Ohio occurred. His doctor would

later tell him macular degeneration (MD) is common there, and that the exposure led to MD's onset.

It starts with "a low grade fever, kind of like a cold. A lot of people have it, and aren't aware of

the fact they have it," Rosenzweig said.

Opposite of retinitis pigmentosa or glaucoma, two other diseases that lead to blindness, MD causes one to lose central vision first, Rosenzweig said. For now, his peripheral vision is fine.

People with MD "eventually go totally blind," Rosenzweig said. As a World War II veteran, Rosenzweig had access to, and knowledge of, a training course through the Veteran's Administration (VA).

"They teach you to operate with what vision you do have," Rosenzweig said.

In 1981, Rosenzweig went to the Blind Center in Palo Alto, Calif., for an 11-week course teaching "Average Daily Living," such as cooking, and washing clothes, to veterans with little or no sight. The center is run by the VA and is available to veterans who are legally blind.

"It's very frustrating when you can't drive a car and you can't read," Rosenzweig said.

The classes teach life skills with the use of tools specifically designed to help people with limited or no sight. Examples of the tools available are a spatula with two sides, which is designed like tongs; a knife with a metal guide to help the measure the size of a cut; lighted lopes, or hand-held magnifying glasses that range in power; clip boards with strings to guide the writing hand and keep written lines straight, and a smaller version for check writing.

He's willing to show his gadgets that help make everyday life a little easier for those with failing vision or none at all.

"I'm very willing to show. I'm especially interested in helping veterans," Rosenzweig said.

Rosenzweig's favorite gadget is a Spectrum Optelle television, which works like viewers for microfiche used in libraries; except it has powerful magnification and an ability to change both text and background colors.

"After a while (reading), it helps to change colors," Rosenzweig said.

Rosenzweig spends much of his time outside, tending raised bed vegetable gardens,

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Veteran Info

For information about veteran's programs, call the Snohomish County Veteran's of Foreign Wars Service office at 425-339-1973 or the Veteran's Assistance Fund at 425-388-7255.

Monroe man shares with veterans, gardeners

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which include an asparagus bed. It takes years to get asparagus going. A bird feeder is guarded by a contraption made from wire fencing and to guard against neighboring cats — Rosenzweig's invention. It took a few tries to figure a way to keep the cats out. Another contraption, three coffee cans taped together and attached below the porch of a birdhouse,

keep the squirrels out of the feed.

Rosenzweig walks to the shed to grab a potato fork, in order to dig up Dwarf irises, Astillby and Fall Crocuses. They're getting to crowded, he says. Besides, people used to build up their variety of plants in yards and gardens by sharing plant-starts.

He places the plants in a plastic grocery bag and hands them to someone he's just met.