

Bangor couple fete 65th anniversary

By Ruth-Elie Cohen
Of the NEWS Staff

BANGOR — On her 65th wedding anniversary, Frieda Miller saw no reason to be understated about her relationship with husband Abe.

"We haven't had disagreements," she said wryly, "we've had fights! Big ones! But the next day it's all over, and it's like it never happened. Fighting isn't necessarily a bad thing — when you fight you communicate."

Sitting in the living room of their Bangor apartment on Thursday, Frieda, 85, and Abe, 90, took time between congratulatory phone calls to look back on their years together, and to offer advice to other couples.

"Take everything in stride, the good with the bad," Abe Miller said. "People get angry, but they always get over it.

Understand one another and be patient."

The couple, who owned Miller's Variety Store — now Miller Drug — are well known for the lunch counter they ran at the store, and for their philanthropic efforts with United Cerebral Palsy of Northeastern Maine and the Bangor City Nursing Facility. Frieda Miller also ran a successful catering business for many years.

Earlier this week, friends recalled the difference the unassuming couple have made in the community.

"They've raised thousands of dollars and personally donated many articles like televisions and radios," said John Kirkpatrick, a supervisor at the Bangor nursing facility. "Any little thing a resident needs, Abe and Frieda make sure they have it."

Kirkpatrick said Frieda Miller comes in each week to keep the residents com-

pany, and "goes out of her way to personally buy Christmas presents for them."

Ruth Shook, former administrator for UCP, recalled the couple's tireless efforts in raising money for Camp CaPella, a summer program in Lucerne for children with cerebral palsy. The pair complement each other, Frieda with her ebullient, take-charge manner, and Abe so quiet and soft-spoken.

"Abe always introduces himself as Mr. Frieda," Shook said, laughing.

The Millers never turned away anyone who was in need, recalled Wilma Bradford of Bangor, who volunteered with Frieda at Eastern Maine Medical Center.

"They probably gave away thousands of dollars of medicine," she said. "When a baby was sick, they'd tell the parents.

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Frieda and Abe Miller, former owners of Miller's Variety Store — now Miller Drug — are known for their service to the Bangor community.

Style

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Millers, from C1

'Pay us when you have the money.'

The Millers have never failed to "take the commandments seriously," said another friend, Steve

"I used to look her over. I liked what I saw."

— Abe Miller, on meeting Frieda, his wife of 65 years

Robbins of Bangor.

"Their life is one gigantic mitzvah," he said, referring to the Jewish word for a good deed. "They do so much, but a lot of people don't know it, because they're so quiet and never call attention to themselves."

Robbins, who worked with Frieda Miller on the annual cerebral palsy telethon, recalled the time he sang "Scarlet Ribbons" during the program.

"Frieda had tears running down her face, and from then on I sang the song every year," he said. "I never said anything, but

she knew I was singing it for her because she loved it. It was something nice I could do for her because she did so many nice things for others."

John Thomas, a local caterer, called Frieda Miller his "mentor."

"Everytime I get raves, it's because of something I learned from Frieda," Thomas said. "Whenever I do a party, I'm always saying to myself, 'No shortcuts, no tired-looking celery. Frieda might be coming through.'"

Thomas was told by his father, a retired physician, that nurses from EMMC would often eat at the Millers' lunch counter, and then ask the couple to put it on a tab.

"Nine out of 10 times, the Millers tore up the receipts," Thomas said.

He recalled that as a child, eating at the Millers' lunch counter was "the biggest treat."

"You couldn't get any better than a milkshake and one of Frieda's egg salad sandwiches," he said. "We never knew what she did, it was some ingredient she slipped in."

The Millers, whose son Bill has since taken over the business, agreed Thursday that the lunch counter had been the highlight of their lives for 57 years.

"I loved every minute there," Frieda Miller said, adding that each customer always became a friend.

Later, it was time for revelations. Frieda Miller looked across the room at her husband. Before they were married, "I had a crush on him," she confided.

Abe Miller had a secret of his own.

"I used to look her over," he admitted. "I liked what I saw."