Nearly 100, Rosedale parishioner describes key to longevity

Joseph Kaminski is only a few days away from turning 100, but he has no plans of giving up his day job.

Just as he has for the last 28 years, the longtime parishioner of the Church of the Annunciation in Rosedale will continue working four hours every weekday as a bindery technician with the Baltimore County Public Schools. It keeps him young, he said.

“My doctor told me if I didn’t take a job, he’d have to bury me,” said Mr. Kaminski, who sets paper to be stapled, puts labels on boxes and operates hole-punch and collating machines. “When I reach 125, I’ll think about retiring – but not until then.”

Hard work is one of the keys to longevity, Mr. Kaminski said, as long as it’s balanced with a faith in God, a good diet and treating everyone with respect.

“Work is good for you, but straining yourself is no good,” said Mr. Kaminski, whose next youngest co-employee at the bindery is nearly half a century younger.

“You have to listen to your body,” said Mr. Kaminski, the son of a Lithuanian father and a Polish mother. “When it’s time to slow down, your body will tell you.”

Hard work seems to be in Mr. Kaminski’s genes. As a young man before the Second World War, he ran several gasoline stations in the Baltimore area – building them from scratch into a thriving business.

The blue-eyed Baltimorean had to sell his business and take a financial hit for Uncle Sam when the U.S. Army drafted him in 1941. After completing a military test, he was assigned to the Air Force, but was soon taken off planes because he had trouble hearing. At his request, Mr. Kaminski played the saxophone in the Air Force Band before receiving a medical discharge in 1943.

Mr. Kaminski played the sax in Baltimore-area bands after the war, and he was on

stage at a Baltimore nightclub when a beautiful “Coca-Cola girl” caught his eye, he said.

“When I saw her walk in, I told the band leader, ‘That’s the girl I’m going to marry,’ ” Mr. Kaminski recalled with a smile. The young musician kept his word and he’s still married to Marie – the “Coca-Cola girl” – nearly 65 years later. The two have an adopted daughter, Debbie.

Sister Susan Engel, M.H.S.H., pastoral associate at the Church of the Annunciation, said the centenarian is a much-loved, welcoming presence in the parish. Always impeccably dressed in a suit, he serves as a dedicated usher and greeter, she said.

“He always has the rosary in one hand and his other hand is outstretched greeting people,” she said.

Mr. Kaminski has a special devotion to the rosary because he believes it’s what got him through the war. When he was drafted, he confided in a Catholic chaplain that he was scared. The chaplain gave him the same black rosary he still carries with him every day. Praying gives him strength, he said.

When Mr. Kaminski was born – during the presidency of Theodore Roosevelt – the average income was $1,111. A gallon of gasoline cost 7 cents and a gallon of milk went for 32 cents.

Asked who his favorite president was, Mr. Kaminski called Bill Clinton “one of the best.”

“We got along with other countries when he was in office,” he observed. “Now we’re enemies, and that’s not good.”

A firm believer in eating oatmeal every day – sometimes right after a meal, Mr. Kaminski said apples are also a regular part of his diet and a big reason for his good health. He also has a weakness for sweets.

“Ice cream is the best,” he said with a mustachioed grin.

If others want to live to 100, Mr. Kaminski offered this advice: Be kind to others.

“Be nice to people even if you don’t like them,” he said. “That way, you walk away without that bitter taste in your mouth. You’ll find your nerves will be a lot better.”