

If you have been around The Helm long enough, you have seen Harry Burkey. Since 2008, Harry has been conducting Texas Hold 'em Competitive Poker lessons and tournaments.

Harry became involved with The Helm when other activities kept him away from home more than his family wanted. At the request of his wife, Janie, to find volunteer activities closer to home, Harry found The Helm.

He didn't want to volunteer with existing programs, however. He wanted to do something new. "Poker, especially competitive poker, is a thinking man's game. It keeps our minds active as we age and it doesn't matter if our other muscles are still strong or not."

Staying positive and active and helping others are the cores to Harry's life. "My mother used to sing this song, Ac-cent-tchu-ate The Positive. Part of the lyrics were 'Eliminate the negative. Latch on to the affirmative. Don't mess with Mister In-Between.' I've always believed that no matter what tragedy is in your life, some good will come out of it. It could be something life-saving for others."

That helps explain the positive thinking part of Harry's life and knowing more about his upbringing explains the active and helping others parts.

Born in Pennsylvania, Harry moved to Michigan around age six when his Dad got a job in an auto factory during World War II. The family lived in project housing until his junior year of high school when the projects were torn down and the family moved to Roseville. Up until his family's move, Harry attended Denby High School, where he was involved in the drama and art clubs, the student radio station, newspaper and yearbook. Because his family moved out of Detroit, Harry could only attend Denby his senior year if he paid tuition, which the family couldn't afford. His radio and drama teachers stepped in and paid his tuition, so he wouldn't quit school.

After graduation, Harry worked at Federal's department store to attend college. Realizing he was on the 8-year college plan, he enlisted in the U.S. Navy and served four years. With his duty complete, he re-enrolled at Wayne State University, attending on the GI Bill. He put aside his earlier desires of becoming an actor and earned a degree in education. He taught middle school English, reading and social studies 32 years in parochial and Detroit Public Schools.

After service and while in college, Harry met and married Lucille, with whom he had three children. Later, when difficulties in the marriage ended in divorce, Harry got involved in acting again, appearing in commercials and modeling for ads and catalogues. He also joined Grosse Pointe Theatre where he met Janie. Together they have seven children (five from Harry's marriage, two from Janie's) six grandchildren and one great-grandchild. Harry remembered what his teachers had done for him and always paid it forward with his students. That continued after he retired from teaching when he began working to make bowling a high school varsity sport. While schools had bowling teams, bowling wasn't considered a varsity sport. Harry changed that and even developed competitive tournaments for middle school and junior varsity bowlers. He served as vice president/president of the Michigan High School Interscholastic Bowling Coaches Association for five years. His involvement with bowling kept him traveling and away from home. That's when Janie asked him to volunteer closer to home – and that's when he found The Helm.

It took Harry nearly two years to convince the powers that be at The Helm (then SOC) to start a poker program. "They didn't want to encourage gambling. I had to convince them how poker keeps our minds active – which is a good thing with older adults." Today, the poker group at The Helm is one of the most popular groups, and Harry remains one valuable asset at The Helm.



## **Harry Burkey**

Active with The Helm since 2008

Keep thinking positive and  
you'll have a better life.



[HTTPS://HEMLIFE.ORG](https://helmlife.org) (313) 882-9600 158 RIDGE ROAD, GROSSE POINTE FARMS, MI 48236