***Upcounty Remembers Pete Dilonardo***

By Carol Oberdorfer

The family and friends of Agapito Louis “Pete” Dilonardo will gather May 5 in Pete’s woodsy Dickerson front yard to remember this remarkable cartographer, father, nurseryman, gardener, woodworker, music lover, avid reader, and Upcounty civic activist who died in December at age 94.

Born in his grandfather’s house in Philadelphia on May 23, 1917, Pete embarked on a life that included working as a kid in his dad’s appliance and radio store, serving in the U.S. Army during World War II, marrying WAVES officer and future Poolesville Elementary School teacher Kathleen “Sally” Pancake in 1943, studying geography at the University of Maryland and McGill University, launching a decades-long career in 1945 as a mapmaker for the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), and raising his two kids, Kathy and Peter, in the family’s historic Federalist-style brick house in Dickerson.

On the side, Pete and Sally operated the Pine Arbor Nursery, a family endeavor, growing and selling native azaleas, dogwoods, and redbuds, as well as more rare and exotic plants and trees. Pete continued to work for the USGS, taking the train to and from Washington at the station in Dickerson just down the tracks from his home. Over the years, his work took him from Colombia to Saudi Arabia, and beyond, where he offered training in cartography and explored the cuisine, culture, and history of those far-off places.

Pete and Sally enjoyed more than fifty years of marriage, travelling, hosting friends and relatives in Dickerson, hiking on the towpath and up Sugarloaf Mountain, tending to their trees and gardens, and taking a stand on local issues. When Sally became ill with Alzheimer’s disease, Pete cared for her at home and in a nursing facility until her death in 1988.

It was Pete’s community service for which many of us remember him. Pete was a fighter, winning some of his battles, and losing some, but remaining steadfast along the way. He and Sally struggled unsuccessfully to have the burnt-down Dickerson Elementary School rebuilt in Dickerson. They joined forces with their neighbors—again unsuccessfully—to block the establishment of the composting and incinerator facilities along the Potomac in Dickerson; but, with fellow activists, they made real headway in pressuring the State of Maryland to bring Neutron Products into compliance with its legal obligations as a handler of radioactive materials.

Into his eighties and nineties, Pete continued to travel—hiking with family into the back country of Mesa Verde and the canyons of New Mexico and Utah, exploring Wyoming, and marveling at the wonders of Hawaii—then sharing his exploits back home in Montgomery County with his fellow members of the Nature Book Club. On one trip to Denver, one of his nieces introduced him to MariLu McGinnis who became his devoted companion on journeys to Greece, Spain, and Italy.

Pete’s occasional cantankerous demeanor was just an act that was quickly belied by his sparkling eyes and warm smile. His good humor, wisdom, and generosity won everybody over.