

# Towns County Herald

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## WWII Vet turns 100, celebrates 80 years married

### Recognizing Jim and Jean Rittenhouse



Hiawassee residents Jim and Jean Rittenhouse will celebrate 80 years of marriage this April 16, and both will reach 100 years old this year. Photo/Submitted

By Megan Eyrich  
Ignite Living at  
Hiawassee Park  
Senior Living

Jim Rittenhouse, born March 31, 1926, and Jean, born Dec. 16, 1926, were only 16 and 15 years old when they met in Birmingham, Alabama, the city where both were born and raised. Ironically, they were not each other's dates.

Jean had a blind date with someone else, and Jim was out with her best friend, Vera. But something clicked. The very next day, Jim showed up at Jean's house. That simple, determined gesture became the beginning of a lifelong love story that has now stretched across nearly a century.

At 18, Jim joined the U.S. Army to serve in World War II. He fought bravely in Austria and Germany and earned a Purple Heart. While the war shaped his courage

and character, it was Jean who continued to anchor his heart.

In 1946, home on a weekend pass, Jim asked Jean once more if she would marry him. This time, she said yes. They spent that entire day arranging a church wedding and were married that evening on April 16, 1946.

His parents traveled from Montgomery to attend. Jean's mother was present as well, though her father, having left town that morning, missed the ceremony due to the limits of communication and distance at the time. Nothing, however, could delay what was meant to be.

And so began 80 years of marriage.

After the war, Jim attended the University of Alabama through the GI Bill. Within 11 months, they welcomed their first child, Jeanne, marking the beginning of their bustling, lively family of seven.

Jim's career with Georgia Power Company took the family from Rome, where Gail was born, to Macon, where Jimmy and Judy joined the family, and eventually to Atlanta in 1963, where their youngest daughter, Jana, arrived in 1965. Through hard work and integrity, Jim rose through the company and was eventually named a Vice President before his retirement in 1988.

In 1971, they hired the construction of a shell for a cabin on Lake Burton and then spent every weekend driving from Roswell to finish the wiring, plumbing, insulation, flooring, fixtures, and painting themselves. It quickly became their favorite place in the world. They later moved there full time and lived beside the water they loved until October 2023, when they made one more brave and thoughtful transition to Ignite Living at Hiawassee Park.

Today, surrounded by mountain views, caring neighbors, and four of their children who now call Hiawassee home, they describe this season as a blessing.

Travel has always been a meaningful part of their story. Through Georgia Power and later in retirement, they explored Europe and journeyed throughout the United States. They eventually visited nearly all 50 states in their RV and continued their adventures well into their 80s.

Along the way, they gathered something even more meaningful than miles. They built lifelong friendships. From their school days in Birmingham to Army service, corporate years, churches, neighborhoods, and now Hiawassee, they have always made friends wherever they go.

Faith has been central in their lives. They were active members of their church-

es, generous with their time, and philanthropic in spirit. Their children believe that the example they set, more than any advice, defines their legacy.

Together they share five children, four sons-in-law, seven grandchildren with their spouses, and seven great-grandchildren. But if you ask what matters most, the answer is simple: each other. Their children describe their marriage as a lifelong love affair. Even today, nearly

80 years later, they still go to sleep holding hands.

On March 31, 2026, Jim will celebrate his 100th birthday. An extraordinary note accompanies this moment. According to Worldwide Marriage Encounter, Jean and Jim are only months behind the longest documented marriage in the State of Georgia. Public records show that former President Jimmy Carter and First Lady Rosalynn Carter shared 77 years of marriage.

On April 16, 2026, the Rittenhouses will reach 80 years of marriage, a remarkable milestone that surpass-

es the length of the Carters' union. While formal statewide verification continues, their achievement places them among the longest married couples in Georgia history and perhaps even its record holders.

Their story proves that lasting love is built in everyday moments, in faithfulness, in perseverance, in shared laughter, and in choosing one another again and again. Eighty years ago, they said "I do." Today, their lives stand as a testament that love, when rooted in devotion, truly can last a lifetime and, in their case, nearly a century.



Jean and Jim Rittenhouse got married 80 years ago while Jim, then an active member of the U.S. Army, was home on a weekend pass. Photo/Submitted