Margot and Tom Wanagiris have been the life of the party at Independence Village since they moved into their two-bedroom home more than three years ago. They describe the neighborhood as warm and welcoming — “a place where it has been easy to make friends.” Margot recently modeled in the jewelry fashion show at the clubhouse, and the couple enjoys the antiques show and tell, where they describe vintage automobiles Tom restored. His first remodel was a 1953 Willys Jeep. It had no handbrake, no seatbelts and one windshield wiper, they remember, along with the great times they had buzzing down the beach in it when they lived in Florida.

They especially enjoy the “brown bag” wine or beer tastings, where friends bring a selection to sample and share. The Wanagiris’ choices often win the prize, and there’s good reason. Tom brews his own beer in a portion of his garage he’s air conditioned and converted into a workroom. The gold standard is the taste of his wife’s favorite from St. Arnold Brewery in Houston. (Although the couple also quickly pointed out they are much more interested in quality than quantity.)

Tom, a retired electrical engineer, keeps meticulous notes from his first batch in 2007. He is eager to start another brew now the weather has turned cooler, noting that he’s found his beer turns “skunky” if he brews when the temperature is above 75 degrees.

The couple hails from a small borough in Pennsylvania, where the largest employer was a brewery. Margot has been friends with Tom’s sister since the seventh grade, so when she and Tom found themselves working in adjoining departments at Pomeroy’s Department Store over their college holiday break, it was easy to strike up a conversation. They remember Tom working in the men’s department, while Margot was assigned “Trim the Tree.”

Tom graduated from Penn State in 1967, they married in 1968, and have a son and daughter who attended Clark High School when the family moved to San Antonio for Tom’s work at Southwest Research Institute.

Tom developed many varied projects with both civilian and government applications, but most pertained to radio wave frequencies. Before Southwest Research, he worked for electronic companies, including Raytheon, that specialize in radio frequency — developing electronic countermeasures, jammers and detection equipment for “every branch of the government you can think of,” he said.

During his tenure at Southwest Research, Tom studied the effect of radiation on sheep, retrofitted RADAR towers on the Aleutian Islands of Alaska, created an almost indestructible radio antenna for armored vehicles, and evaluated software for use on the International Space Station.

Another invention, creating an electronic “force field” to deflect bullets to deter potential assassins, garnered him an invitation to attend President George Bush’s inauguration parade. Tom believes he follows in the footsteps of his namesake grandfather who was known for being a tinkerer. “He loved anything he could take apart and put together,” Tom said. The couple proudly reports they have a granddaughter who recently graduated from Georgia Tech as a chemical engineer, thereby carrying on the family engineering tradition.

For more information on the lifestyle offered at Independence Village, call (210) 764-5260, or go to www.independencevillage.com.