You can call her the chainsaw-toting grandmother.

Helen Seidel of the Town of Port Washington amazes her family, friends and strangers with her determination to maintain her home and property almost as well as her husband did when he was alive.

Her husband Peter died in 1999.

“When my husband passed away, I didn’t know how to start the riding lawn mower,” Seidel said.

She was determined to be independent and learned how to work all the equipment her husband had and added more over the years.

Seidel, who will turn 84 on June 2 and has four grandchildren, recently bought an electric chainsaw so she could chop away at her honeysuckle bush, which is half dead. She’s hoping the pruning will spur new growth.

The lightweight, electric chainsaw should do the job perfectly, Seidel said.

The chainsaw is stored in the garage alongside a log splitter, rototiller, wood chipper and leaf blower vacuum.

Last year, Seidel sealed the asphalt of her double-wide, 100-foot-long driveway by herself.

“I helped my husband do it the last time and thought, ‘Why can’t I do it?’ So I did it,” Seidel said of the immaculate driveway. She had swept it with a broom that morning.

When Seidel bought asphalt sealer from Drew’s Hardware Store in Port Washington — where she also bought the chainsaw — the delivery man placed the heavy containers at key points along the driveway so when one container was empty, the next one was handy.

Last fall, Seidel painted her home’s trim, porch railings and shutters she could reach. She hired someone to paint the higher trim of her two-story home.

Seidel doesn't make as many fires in her fireplace as she used to, so she hasn't used the log splitter recently. If the wood pile gets low, she will start it up again.

When the timbers around her gardens were rotting a few years ago, Seidel replaced them herself with new ones.

She likes to shovel snow, but her neighbor tries to beat her to it. He lets her do the steps and sidewalk.

"I have the best neighbors," she said. "I love them.

"I'm a nut. I love to shovel snow by hand. When there's a little bit, I'll do the whole driveway. I love the exercise. I want to do the work. I love taking care of my home."

When she's indoors, especially in winter or on a rainy day, she is usually knitting or crocheting. Seidel can knit a sweater in a week, rarely using a pattern. She prefers creating her own design and has won numerous awards at local and state levels for her needlework. Her pieces often have both knit and crochet elements.

Seidel, who grew up in Austria near Innsbruck, is also an avid accordion player. She was 14 when she got her first accordion.

"My father bought a little accordion with eight keys, and I started playing it," she said. Her father then got her a full-size accordion, which she still treasures.

Mostly, she plays a computerized accordion that makes her a one-person band. She enjoys playing polkas, with a little jazz, blues and classical music thrown in, at area senior centers, nursing homes and assisted-living facilities and has recorded several CDs.

Playing her accordion is also a way for her to relax.

"I love music. I wake up with a song in my head," she said.

Seidel, who was a nurse in Austria, met her husband when he was a patient at the hospital where she worked. He took several pictures of her.

"He said if I wanted the pictures, I had to go on a date with him," Seidel said.

The date led to a romance.

The couple left Austria in 1953 shortly after their marriage because they couldn't find an apartment. Everything had been bombed during the war.

They moved to Canada near Windsor, Ont., where her husband had relatives who sent money for their passage. In 1961, they moved to the Town of Port Washington.

Their two oldest daughters were born in Canada and the youngest one in Port Washington.

Seidel was a medical transcriber at the former St. Alphonsus Hospital in Port Washington for 23 years, retiring in 1992 when the hospital moved to Mequon.

Seidel's daughter Elizabeth Boone, who lives in Ann Arbor, Mich., said she was worried about her mother when her father died.

"My father did most things around the house and all the yard maintenance. In other words, he spoiled her a little bit," she said.

"When he passed away, we were shocked because it was sudden, and I was rather concerned for my mother. They had a good marriage, and he did everything.

"After about a year, I quickly realized my mother would be fine. She just learned how to do things on her own. I've expressed to her that she will be a hard act to follow."

Image Information: Helen Seidel is strong and independent at almost 84 years old, and she proves it by caring for her Town of Port Washington property with everything from a snow shovel to a chain saw.