

Published May 30th, 2018

Centenarians rule three-quarter century lunch

By Sora O'Doherty



John Fazel crowns Queen Elva Rust, who celebrated her 100th birthday on April 1. Photos Sora O'Doherty

Brad Davis, a volunteer member of Lamorinda Sunrise Rotary, was the baby of the year at the 19th annual Three-Quarter Century Luncheon on May 16 at the Orinda Community Church. While at 75, he was the youngest of the 90 attendees, the king and queen were 101 and 100 respectively. There was almost a tie for longest married couple: Joe and June Haughin beat another couple by just one month; both couples having been married for 66 years.

The event, the creation of John Fazel of Better Homes & Gardens Real Estate, was co-hosted by the Lamorinda Sunrise Rotary and the Orinda Community Church. Fazel was the master of ceremonies, ditching last year's "summer of love" costume for elegant white tie attire. Another attendee who was also at the first Three-Quarter Century Lunch as mayor 19 years ago was Orinda Mayor Amy Worth, who was delighted to chat with fellow motorcycle riders, Wayne and Katalin Phillips. Worth noted that May is designated as Older Americans Month. Wayne Phillips was responsible for the successful campaign for motorcycle parking spaces in Orinda, which he continues to enjoy using. Katalin worked for 30 years at UC Berkeley in the electrical engineering lab making integrated circuits. Wayne was a chemist for Standard Oil but made his real money, he said, in his company selling laboratory supplies. He commuted to Livermore on his motorcycle, and always found a parking place.

The oldest man present, George Jedenoff at 101 years of age, was crowned king. His wife died two years ago at age 95. While she was ill, he limited himself to only five days of skiing annually. Jedenoff loves skiing, which he took up at the age of 43. Last year he skied on his 100th birthday, and the video of the event became a YouTube phenomenon. "You don't have to be good to be famous," Jedenoff concluded, "you just have to live long enough."

Queen Elva Rust celebrated her 100th birthday on April 1. Her daughter, Barbara Ward, threw her a garden party for 65 guests the evening before. Ward lives just five houses away from her mother. Rust married in 1946 and moved to Orinda from Oakland in 1950, and she and her husband built the house where they raised their children. An avid hiker in her younger years, Rust and her brother climbed Mt. Whitney around 1948. At 14,505 feet, the mountain is the highest summit in the contiguous United States. "It wasn't that hard," Rust remembered. They camped three-quarters of the way up, taking two days to complete the climb.

Rust studied public health at UC Berkeley and later worked in the U.S. Virus Lab on campus. She bemoaned how expensive education is today. Her husband was a Stanford graduate and came from Washington state. To occupy herself on the long drives up to Washington to visit his family, Rust learned to embroider, and her home is decorated with beautiful embroidered pieces. Widowed for 18 years, Rust enjoys her grandchildren and loves gardening, although instead of the vegetables she used to grow she is now "down to tomatoes," she says. A book lover, Rust can be found at the Orinda Books book club the first Thursday of each month.

Another Cal grad, JoAnne Lande came to the lunch by herself. Lande taught at Camino Pablo in Moraga for 30 years, retiring in 2000. She then did substitute teaching and tutoring and continues tutoring to this day. In addition to volunteer work, she loves working in her yard and reading.

The speaker at the event was Dr. Walter Bortz, clinical professor of medicine at Stanford and author of many books, including "Dare to Be 100," "Living Longer for Dummies," "We Live Too Short and Die Too Long," and "The Roadmap to 100." Bortz was a return speaker, having spoken at the lunch 15 years ago, and talked about the secret to long life. "Be necessary," he exhorted, "need somebody and have somebody who needs you. You need a reason to get out of bed." His reason is his partner, Jean Kennedy, whom he met on Match.com after the passing of his wife of 62 years. Bortz is still teaching at Stanford and still writing at 88. His latest interest is in a group of people over the age of 110, known as super centenarians. To live 100 healthy years, he concluded, you need two things: "guts and smarts."



King George Jedonoff, 101 years old, speaks to the crowd.

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