



Stephanie Janke, an activities assistant, kisses Vesta Warner, 100, on the cheek to wish her a happy birthday during a celebration Wednesday for the six resident centenarians at the Lely Palms Retirement Community in East Naples. NICOLE RAUCHEISEN/NAPLES DAILY NEWS

CENTENARIAN CELEBRATION

Six 100-year-old women honored in East Naples

Callie Schmidt Naples Daily News | USA TODAY NETWORK – FLORIDA

They lived through the Great Depression and World War II. They witnessed women getting the right to vote and the civil rights movement. ■ Centenarians — 100 years or older — are rare, but six women living at the Lely Palms Retirement Community just celebrated that achievement of longevity. ■ “Naples is a Blue Zone community, and this (celebration) personifies that,” said Naples Mayor Bill Barnett, who honored the six women Wednesday afternoon at a luncheon attended by almost 90 people. “They’re all sharp. One of my serious goals is to be a centenarian.” **See CENTENARIANS, Page 4A**



Marion Katzman, 101, from left, Lillian Carey, 102, Merle Harris, 100, Vesta Warner, 100, Claire Connolly, 100, and Helen Crim, 100, listen as Naples Mayor Bill Barnett reads a proclamation honoring the six centenarians at the Lely Palms Retirement Community in East Naples. NICOLE RAUCHEISEN/ NAPLES DAILY NEWS

Centenarians

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The national longevity rate is going down while Naples' is going up, Barnett said — a statement backed up by 24/7 Wall Street, which reported in 2016 that residents of the Naples-Immokalee-Marco Island metro area have the longest lifespans in the country. Life expectancy in the area is 83.5 years. That's 4.7 years longer than the expected lifespan of the typical American.

The six women all received personal letters from Gov. Rick Scott and will be receiving letters from President Donald Trump in the next couple of weeks, according to Denise Bolton, marketing director for Lely Palms, which is in East Naples.

The event was the brainchild of Erin Sakmar, executive director of Lely Palms. She plans to make the celebration an annual one.

'She made maps before Google'

Lillian Carey, who hails from New Jersey, will turn 102 on Saturday.

Carey was a cartographer for the Army.

"She made maps before Google Maps," said Carey's daughter, Ginny Nolan.

Nolan and her family arrived in Naples on Carey's birthday 45 years ago.

"We didn't buy a present, we just showed up and said, 'Happy birthday! Here we are,'" Nolan said.

"Will we have birthday cake?" Carey asked a few times during the luncheon, occasionally when speakers were presenting. Carey has some hearing loss, and everyone in the crowd could hear her ask about the

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To see more photos and a video of the birthday party, go to naplesnews.com.

cake, but they simply smiled. Nolan chuckled and playfully hid her face in her hands.

Memories of WWII times

Helen Crim, 100, who moved to Naples in 1985, was born in Iowa.

Her first date was at age 16. She went to a movie with the son of her high school's superintendent.

She earned a degree in corporate finance and started her career "taking over a man's job" at a bank.

One of her favorite memories was seeing the role women took in government while men were off fighting in World War II. Crim served in the Red Cross during WWII and met her husband in India.

Her words of wisdom?
"Never give up."

Gifts for every Glades child

Merle Harris, 100, is a Florida native from the Everglades.

She remembers when Barron Collier, a New York City advertising and real estate developer whom Collier County was named after, came to give Christmas presents to every child in the Everglades. Harris and her sister each received a doll.

Harris, who moved to Naples in 1926, said the biggest change she has seen is the development and building

of Naples.

Her favorite hobbies are going to the beach and researching genealogy, which is how she found out she is related to Margaret Mitchell, author of "Gone with the Wind." She took a train to see it in New York, and it's her favorite movie.

Invited to White House

Vesta Warner, 100, was born in Columbus, Ohio, and moved to Naples in 1974 after a vacation.

The biggest change she has seen in her 100 years has been travel on airplanes, which she experienced when invited to the White House, where she wore one of her handmade gowns.

Warner's words of wisdom?
"Always be truthful."

Wisdom seen in silence

Marion Katzman, 101, was born in Chicago and moved to Naples for a teaching job. Her favorite memory from her childhood was playing jacks with other kids.

Her words of wisdom come from a variation of a quote originally attributed to Abraham Lincoln or Mark Twain:
"Keep your mouth shut."

Knew husband since childhood

Claire Connolly, 100, was born in New York City and retired to Naples in 1972.

The biggest change in her life was when her husband died. They had known each other since they were children and were on the track team together. Their first car was a pea-green Chevy with only two seats and a rumble seat in the back.

Connolly's words of wisdom:
"God is love."