

BLUE ZONES

“The really important thing is not to live, but to live well...and to live well means the same thing as to live honourably or rightly.” –Socrates



Ruth Anderson celebrates 102 years. FLORIDA

Turning 102 years young: A centenarian's celebration of life

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“It’s a good life. That’s all I have to say.”

Effortlessly fluttering about The Arlington Retirement Community, the first Blue Zones Project triple-approved Faith Based Organization, HOA and Worksite, is a social butterfly of tiny stature with a legendary status.

You would think her tales of lore unbelievable, that is until you look at her birth certificate. Her lifeline includes World War I, Women’s Suffrage, the Great Depression, World War II, the Korean War, the Civil Rights Movement, Vietnam, The Great Recession, 9/11 and she is among a handful of people on the planet who have endured both 100 year global pandemics; the 1918 Spanish flu and the current novel coronavirus.

By the time she was 2, she became a local celebrity when she was pictured in the Boston Globe being held by the baseball legend Babe Ruth at Fenway Park just before he was traded to the Yankees.

She still sews her own clothes, operates a computer with the savvy of a millennial, walks unassisted daily until she hits her steps goal on her Apple watch (not an insignificant accessory since her daughter worked for Steve Jobs and she made his acquaintance once upon a stop in the break-room), and occasionally takes her car out for a spin — yes, from the driver’s seat.

A childhood Bostonian, she treats herself to a Dunkin Donuts Munchkin, or maybe two, and coffee once a week for breakfast. Each night at dinner, with a small glass of Manischewitz wine in hand, she rotates her company to ensure she is making friends with everyone. She’s done this since grade

school. Conscious of the idea, even at a young age, that sitting with the same people over and over again would limit her ability to build long lasting connections.

At her table has sat Wernher von Braun, the aerospace engineer who invented the modern day rocket in Nazi Germany before moving to the United States to work for NASA. The last-minute third place setting was at the request of her husband who had a hungry colleague that didn’t have any plans for dinner.

She has dined in greatness, noting that while sitting at an illustrious Massachusetts Institute of Technology reunion dinner her husband leaned over to her and said, “There are five Nobel Peace Prize winners sitting at our table.” Were she not so modest about her contributions to the field of technology, it is likely she could have joined their ranks.

She was among the 3% of American women who graduated college in 1939 and was subsequently hired by the M.I.T. Mathematics Department to be a code computer for the war effort. “There were no computers in that day,” she giggles. “I was the computer!” Humbly, she mentions that she helped develop radar to beat the Germans.

At war’s end she was recruited by a U.S. naval admiral to move to California and use her computing expertise to help the Navy track drones.

She was way ahead of her time and time has still not caught up to her.

Her name is Ruth Anderson, and she recently turned 102 years old.

Ruth is a prime example of the non-conventional vision behind NCH Healthcare System’s decision to bring Blue Zones Project to Southwest Florida as its sponsor. Seeing as the U.S. spends upwards of \$1.5 trillion on chronic disease related illness every year, the NCH Board agreed that work-

ing to keep residents out of the hospital by helping them live longer, healthier and happier lives would result in a more vibrant, resilient and economically sound community.

Even at 102, Ruth has only been hospitalized twice. Once for the birth of her daughter, and secondly when she broke her 100-year-old hip. She does not suffer from any chronic diseases and attributes her longevity to her positive outlook that her father instilled in her. “He never said goodbye,” she exclaims. “He always said, ‘Keep smiling.’” In fact, those are the last words he said to her before he died.

When asked about death, Ruth says she isn’t scared, just curious as to what it will be like.

Although Ruth was well into her 90s by the time Blue Zones Project started, there is evidence of the Blue Zones Power 9, a set of principles shared by the longest-lived people in the world, playing a part in her life. She was still volunteering — processing fingerprints for Collier County Sheriff’s Office, and running deliveries for Meals on Wheels well into her 90s. Even in the last two years she dressed up for Halloween and delivered over 200 Munchkins to residents at The Arlington.

Nothing is, or ever was, complicated in life from Ruth’s perspective and she made it that way. She has no regrets, cannot recall any elongated moments of anger or stress, and says because she’s a planner, she is really happy that most of her dreams came true.

“I’m just a happy person,” she says, “and I think happy people live longer.”

Happy Birthday Ruth! Keep smiling.

Megan Greer is worksite lead for the Blue Zones Project of Southwest Florida.