

Senior adults share age-old wisdom

LAURA DENON

STAFF WRITER

No one can answer the secrets to living a long, healthy, meaningful life better than a group of nearly 100-year-olds.

Recently, Transylvanians 100 years old, or close to it, were invited for a community birthday celebration at Silvermont mansion.

"The purpose of this party is to honor all seniors in Transylvania County," said Kathe Harris, chair of the Transylvania County Council on Aging, who helped organize it.

"This may surprise you that in Transylvania County 39% of the residents are over the age of 60," she said. "Senior issues are very important."

Brevard Mayor Maureen Copelof read a city proclamation declaring May as Older Americans Month.

"The city of Brevard is committed to supporting everyone in our diverse community and that means age diversity," said Copelof.

"I am dedicated to making sure that we listen to the voices, that we hear the needs, that we get the input from our older Americans so that when we make plans when we make budget decisions, when we decide how our city is going to grow that we take that need into consideration along with all the rest," Copelof said.

"Let's continue to remember that our older community residents are truly a treasure and let's treat them that way," she said.

TIPS TO REACH 100

Paula Hartman-Stein, local gerontologist and Transylvania County's representative in the Senior Tar Heel Legislature in North Carolina, conducted a panel with local residents between 94 and 100 years old for the audience.

"The research shows us that there's no biological marker as to when we are 'old' and most people feel that 'old people' are 10 years older than what they are," said Hartman-Stein.

Participants answered questions such as how they stay healthy, what advice they would give their younger selves, what accomplishments they were proud of and if they were afraid of death.

"I eat right, get a good night sleep, watch the news, I come to Silvermont for classes which I enjoy

See **WISDOM ON A12**



Laura Denon | The Transylvania Times

Community members turn out for the birthday party celebrating 100-year-olds and those close to it.

WISDOM

CONTINUED FROM A1

very much, I have good friends I stay in touch with," answered Carolyn Winchester, 97.

"I'm very blessed to have had five children," Winchester said. "I taught school, high school, for 30 years and saw lots of students that achieved many ambitions that they had."

After retiring from teaching U.S. history, biology and Spanish, Winchester then served on the county's Board of Education.

"Me and my cat get along very well," she added. "I still have a valid driver's license but you'll be glad to know I don't use it."

"I try not to worry about little stuff and I've learned that most things are little stuff," Winchester advised. "I think you should always tell your family you love them and enjoy their company."

Freddie Hart loves walking so much, she declared herself a walking addict.

"I had been walking four miles a day but the cardiologist told me that was foolish," she said. "I should only do two because anything beyond that is just water over the bridge."

She also practices yoga and has regular checkups with her family doctor.

"I think I have a positive outlook on life and I love humor," said Hart. "If you can't laugh at it, you're in trouble. So that's basically what I do to keep myself young."

Hart said she was most proud of earning her bachelor's of science degree after she had been out of school for 40 years.

"I went to Mars Hill and I had to write a paper about what I planned to do when I got my degree," she said. "My answer at the bottom of the page was: 'I



One-hundred-year-old Transylvanian Ruth Ambler takes center stage during the party and shares some life advice with Paula Hartman-Stein.

plan to retire."

"I had always heard that if you went to college, you could find a man to marry, and my first husband had died," she said. "And by George, I did."

She said she would tell her younger self to relax more and not make a big deal out of something that will probably go away tomorrow.

"Don't say something before you have figured out what you should say and learn to listen," she advised. "Absolutely listen to what other people say."

Ed Ehmann walks his dog at least four times a day about a quarter of a mile, rain or shine.

"My biggest accomplishment is we have four children and they're all extremely successful, much more than I ever was or will be," said Ehmann. "I speak to them maybe once or twice a week on the phone. None of them live around here; they live in California, Nevada and Long Island."

When asked if he was afraid of death, he said he is not but he tries to live by what he learned

in the Boy Scouts. "Be prepared," he said. "It's going to happen."

Ehmann continues to volunteer at the Children's Center in Brevard. "I sit at a desk and answer the phone," he said. "And do anything they want me to do."

Nancy Davidson also stays very active.

"I play golf," she said. "And when I play golf, I walk."

"I think education is very important," she said. "You have to learn to get along with people. You have to learn how to live in society."

One-hundred-year-old Ruth Ambler said she "stays very, very busy."

"I write letters and cards and keep in touch with people," she said. "I'm getting a lot of mail from the government — I answer a little bit of it but not all of it."

Ninety-nine-year-old Henry Dixon said, "I started painting in 1938 and I'm still painting and so that's what keeps me going."

He continues to climb ladders to paint.

"I've done two rooms up here when they opened this place up," he said gesturing to the upstairs rooms at Silvermont.

This winter Dixon learned how to weave plastic grocery bags into sleeping mats for people experiencing homelessness.

"I have done 22 of them," he said. We've taken three, four, over to Sharing House and different people tell me that they know somebody that is sleeping out back at Walmart or something like that."

Hilda Folger, 96, provided responses which Hartman-Stein read. Folger could not make the event because she was traveling in Hawaii.