

## At age 107, she still loves a party

Florence Shulenburg may or may not be the oldest resident of Quincy -- the city clerk's office can't say for sure -- but as she turns 107 years old today, she will do it in style at the Eventide Home.



PHOTO/ GREG DERR/PATRIOT LEDGER

Florence Shulenburg of Quincy turns 107 Oct. 7 at Eventide Home.

QUINCY – Florence Shulenburg may or may not be the oldest resident of Quincy -- the city clerk's office can't say for sure -- but as she turns 107 years old today, she will do it in style.

"I think I need some high heels," Shulenburg told her daughter, Patty Devin, last week as they planned her outfit -- a fancy black jeweled sweater and lacey blouse -- for the monthly residents birthday party Tuesday at the William B. Rice Eventide Home, where she has lived since July.

"My mother is definitely a fashionista," Devin, 66, of Quincy said. "She always had hats, jewelry, pocketbooks, shoes and she always notices what others are wearing."

In fact, at the party, as soon as Shulenburg spotted the festive decorative birthday hat for "the Queen," she asked if she could put it on and then beamed.

The skilled nursing home holds a party every month for all the residents with birthdays that month, and October also includes Josephine Walsh, who will be 93, Cecile Leclair, who was 89 on Tuesday and several others. This month, the party featured a special cookout luncheon, hosted by b. good restaurants; Walsh is the grandmother of Jon Olinto, one of the founders, and his parents, John and Joan Olinto of Milton were there to help.

Shulenburg, who learned to drive a Model T at age 16, drove a green VW for years, rode horseback as a young woman and wanted to go up in a hot air balloon for her 100th birthday, is keeping both feet on the ground for this birthday celebration.

"She was always a real free spirit," Devin said. "Very assertive and self confident and funny and happy -- and she got funnier as she got older."

Several of Shulenburg's children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren were at the party, along with one of her other favorite visitors – Java, a greyhound therapy dog who visits once a week with his Weymouth owner, Bruce Kantor. Shulenburg has 16 great-grandchildren and seven grandchildren. Her granddaughters, Cheryl Devin-McCole and Michelle Cooper, sat beside her at the luncheon table with five great-grandchildren: Jon Cooper, Caitlin Cooper, Neil McCole, Dylan McCole and Erin McCole.

This landmark occasion came as a bit of a surprise for her family, after she survived a fall last year at 106 and bounced back from pneumonia at age 104, with a mild recurrence last year.

“We were not expecting 107,” Devin said. “The way she is going, I’ve told my children that grandma is going to outlive her children and they will be taking care of her.”

Asked what she liked to do best at age 107, Shulenburg said, "There are so many nice things around here." Complimented on her mental alertness, she said, "I have no idea what good my mind would do someone else, but I don't care." And she confirmed that she refused to tell her age until she turned 80 and now gives it up easily. "Everyone knows now just because it got around" she said.

Patrice Massa, the director of admissions, said Shulenburg is "very aware of what is going on around her."

Shulenburg, whose maiden name was McGrath, was born in Canton, one of nine children, and she attended schools there and in Stoughton. Of the nine, she was the smallest at four pounds and is the last to survive.

After high school, she worked in an office and was in her 30s when she married Frederick Shulenburg, a Boston firefighter and police officer for 50 years. They had four children and divorced after 35 years. They raised their family in So. Boston, where she lived until she was 96. Her son, Mark, 71, lives in Greenfield; another son, David, 65, is in Maine, and a third son, John, died at age 3.

Longevity runs in this family. Of the nine, all six sisters lived into their 90s, one making it to 97, and her grandfather lived to 88 and her grandmother to 85.

As a younger adult, Devin said, "She loved the classics, art, and loved to tell stories about her youth. She kept her love letters and she had a lot of them. We used to read them and laugh. And she follows sports celebrities -- she had a major crush on Tiger Woods and (former Celtics) Dave Cowens was another one.

Shulenburg enjoyed good health and didn't go to doctors for most of her life, and when she did, in her 80s, she instructed: "You can examine me from the neck up and the knees down."

At 96, she sold her house in South Boston and moved to senior housing in Athol near her son and niece. She lived there eight years, then moved to another residence in Baldwinsville and after she fell and broke her wrist this past year, the family moved her to Eventide to be near more family members.

Her easy-going nature was evident when told she still has a wonderful smile.

"Isn't that ridiculous! But I'll take your word for it," she said -- with a smile.



*Sue Scheible is a staff reporter for The Patriot Ledger who writes a weekly column, A Good Age, about life after 50. In her blog, she shares extra anecdotes about the people she meets, readers' e-mails, videos, photos and phone messages, and ideas for what to do in retirement or to prepare for retirement.*