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Posted: 07.10.06 @ 10 p.m.

## Area Centenarians Honored

 By **Genoa Barrow** | OBSERVER SENIOR STAFF WRITER

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Some significant moments took place in 1897. Edwin P. McCabe founded the Oklahoma Colored Agricultural and Normal University, now known as Langston University. It was the first time an African American received a bachelor's degree from Cornell University. The year also marked the birth of two of Sacramento's oldest living residents.



**Mae Etta Castain, 104, once a teacher, was involved in a 1940s landmark civil rights case in Louisiana concernin equal pay for White and Black teachers.**

George Francis and Mother Ruby Muhammad, both 109 years old, were honored recently during the Fourth Annual Centenarian Celebration, hosted by the organization Take A Stand Against Elder Abuse and the Sacramento County Department of Health and Human Services' Senior and Adult Services Division. The event was held at the Lions Gate Hotel and paid tribute to 30 locals who are at least 100 years old. Ten of this year's honorees were African American.

The other African American honorees were David Battle, age 101; Odessa Brown, age 101; Mae Etta Castain, age 104; Frankie Days, age 100; Florence Morris, age 101; Lillie Walton, age 104; Ethel Washington, age 100; and Lurlean Wheeler, age 102.

The beauty of recognizing centenarians is twofold. Some have been honored before, but for others it was a new experience. They are not honoring the same people over and over again and they are honoring the same people over and over again, as folks are living longer.

Coordinator Rosalind Garner said there were a total of 10 new centenarians overall and four of them were African American.

"We hear about the centenarians in a number of ways," she shared. "We send out a (Public Service Announcement) and get responses from family/friends who read about the event, word of mouth, we do a data search of our In Home Supportive Services clients; we call the local skilled nursing and/or assisted living facilities and ask for nominations."

Naturally, some could not attend and others came with ailments that are associated with advanced age and others were as spry as they were 50 years ago. The message, however, rang clear, "we're still here."

"This year we had the largest number of centenarians turn out for the dinner, 20," shared Garner, a program planner with the Sacramento County Department of Health and Human Services' Senior and Adult Services Division.

Through the Division, volunteers run the non-profit organization Take a Stand Against

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Elder Abuse and work to "maintain an acceptable level of protective and prevention services for seniors and adults with disabilities." The goal is to also heighten public awareness about the needs of seniors and disabled adults.

The event, which also featured a silent auction, raised money for those services. The Centenarian Dinner is a unique event.

"Where else can you hear a 101-year-old perform a gospel song that rocks the house?" Garner said, referring to a performance by Battle.

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Battle was born in Scotts Crossing, Ark. on Feb. 2, 1905. A pastor of 55 years, he says his greatest passion in life is his deep faith and relationship with God; it was his evangelism that brought him to Sacramento.

Asked about his longevity, Battle quotes a scripture in the Book of Psalms, "Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers. But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers."

Brown was born on April 13, 1905 to Joe Henry Mabrey, Jr. and Ikey Dial (Barber) Mabrey. She grew up in Calvert, Texas where her father was self-employed as a carpenter and her mother earned money selling buttermilk, butter and eggs. Her mother was an Eastern Star and her father was a Mason.

Brown's grandparents could read and write during a time when that ability was unusual for descendants of slaves. Brown went on to be a teacher and lived in Texas, Tulsa, Okla. and Richmond, Calif. where her first husband worked in the shipyards. She moved to Sacramento in 1996 to live with her daughter's family.

Longevity runs in the family; Brown's grandfather Joe Henry Mabrey Sr. lived to be 91, her grandmother Viney Mabrey lived to be 95, her mother was 94, an aunt was 97, and her brother Ernest lived to the age of 102. Besides having good genes, Brown's tips for longevity include "having regard for others, following the Golden Rule, and knowing the difference between right and wrong."

Mae Etta Castain was born on June 22, 1902 in Waco, Texas. Her father was a sharecropper and later worked building and repairing train engines. Her mother died in childbirth when Mae Etta was 13. After graduation, she became a teacher, and married a young Methodist minister, Cammie Castain, and moved to Louisiana.

Castain became involved in a landmark civil-rights case over equal pay. In the early 1940s in Plaquermine, Louisiana where she was working, White teachers were being paid \$125 to \$150 a month, while Black teachers were paid about \$85 a month. The case - which involved several teachers from nearby towns - drew the attention of Thurgood Marshall, then an attorney for the NAACP.

Today, Castain is a familiar figure at Davis United Methodist Church where she recruits and supervises youth volunteers. When asked the secret for a long life, she says "Give God credit for all the blessings, and thank Him for taking care of you. Whatever your goals are, trust in God for accomplishing your goals, look to Him for guidance and help in all your struggles. Keep that in mind."

Days was born in Whistler, Alabama on June 5. As an educator, she taught both grades one through eight in public school and also taught at the Brookley Air Force Base in Alabama. The local elder was so passionate about teaching that she also taught Sunday school for both adult church members and their children at the Pilgrim Rest Church in Mobile, Ala. Her favorite church song is "Walk in the Light." Days is currently a member of St. Paul Baptist Church, and attends church three times a week. She moved to Sacramento when she was 89 years old, after the death of her husband, to be closer to her family.

Francis was born on June 6, 1897, in New Orleans and has lived in three centuries. Always an active, happy-go-lucky person, his agility and physical prowess won him prizes as a dancer, and money as a prizefighter. He donated the money he earned from his years of prizefighting to his church in New Orleans. His fondest memories include

seeing notable figures such as Booker T. Washington giving a speech when he was seven years old and Louis Armstrong dressed as "the Zulu King" in the 1949 New Orleans Mardi Gras parade.

In the late 1940s, Francis moved his family to Oak Park where he opened a barbershop and attended Immaculate Conception Church. In the neighborhood, Francis was fondly known as "the ambassador of Oak Park."

Francis' family includes four children, 19 grandchildren, 33 great grandchildren, and 13 great-great grandchildren. He counts them as his major achievement and thanks Mother Nature, his active lifestyle, and continuing interest in hobbies for his long life.

Morris was born in Fort Jessup, La. on August 16, 1904. As a young child, her family lived in the woods on a farm where they worked the few acres of land year round. She is the third of 15 children, of which she is the only one remaining.

Although Morris only went to the fifth grade, she says that the Lord blessed her to meet people that taught her a great deal about life. Most of her working life Mrs. Morris cooked for hotels, café's and private homes. She was also an expert hand seamstress before sewing machines were in general use.

Her greatest achievement, she says, was to giving up sin. "God washed me in his spirit; God gave me courage to live my life!" she exclaims.

She moved to Sacramento in 1999 to be closer to her daughter and family.

Mother Muhammad is one of the area's most recognized seniors. She is active in the Nation of Islam and was given the title and distinction of "Mother of the Nation of Islam" by leader Minister Louis Farrakhan in 1986.

"Mother Ruby" as she is affectionately known, was born Ruby Macie Grayer in the small town of Sandersville, Ga. on March 20, 1897. She grew up in Americus, Ga. Her razor sharp wit is matched with a razor sharp memory.

Mother Muhammad recalls that by age 6 she was working in the Southern fields picking cotton, tobacco, pulling peanuts and digging holes for planting. She has worked in farms in Plains, Ga. – the birthplace of former President Jimmy Carter. "In fact, I grew up working in his father's plantation," she said.

Muhammad credits her longevity to her faith — in God and in herself. "I am where I am because I had faith, I had confidence and I believed that I could do it.

In 2001, she published her first book of poems titled "Who Do They Say I Am?" She is currently using her laptop computer to write her memoirs.

Mother Walton, as her friends call Mrs. Walton, is a lovely full-figured woman known for her stylish dress and happy demeanor. About 15 years ago, she was named the "Mother" of Sacramento's Faith Landmark Missionary Baptist Church. Her strong faith has made her a legend; counseling the distraught, preparing and reading poems for special occasions and serving as a role model to many.

Walton was born in Louisiana, January 4, 1902, one of nine children who learned the meaning of hard work early in life. She and three of her sisters would wash aprons for a barbeque business to earn money to go to the show. Her mother worked in the fields, while her father had allergies, meaning he was allergic to work, says Mother Walton with a straight face. She didn't attend school as she was needed to care for an invalid sister. She remembers the racism and the terrible injustices that African Americans experienced in Louisiana, such as the lynchings and beatings, but prefers to focus on the goodness of God who she says "will take you through it all."

Her greatest pleasure in life, she says, is her family. She enjoys spoiling her great and great-great grandchildren.

Born April 28, 1906, in Fort Worth, Texas, Washington's lifelong motto has been "Be the best, no matter what you have." One of nine children, her childhood memories are of

time spent picking cotton, working in the large family's yard and camping for pleasure. Besides calling Fort Worth home, she has also lived in Wichita Falls, Texas, Denver, Colorado, Oklahoma, Wyoming and Ogden, Utah. The place she remembers traveling to most fondly was Atlanta, Ga., where she visited the Martin Luther King Memorial.

Though she recalls how segregation affected her in school and in church, and acknowledges it was a difficult time, her positive attitude allowed her to appreciate the people and things that gave her life meaning. She moved to Sacramento from Utah to help take care of her granddaughter, Jocelyn. Mrs. Washington says, "Whenever I move to a new town, I go to church." She is currently a member of Shiloh Baptist Church.

Wheeler, known as "Mama Wheeler" by friends and loved ones, has lived a life dedicated to service to others. Born in Louisiana, she worked alongside her parents and 10 siblings for their family's survival. The oldest child in her large family, Mama Wheeler was her mother's "strong right arm," helping her not only with their laundry business, but also in caring for her many younger brothers and sisters.

Wheeler has been an active member of the African Methodist Episcopal Church throughout her life. She feels her greatest achievement is her belief and deep, abiding relationship with God. As a missionary, she often visited the destitute in their homes, helped feed the homeless, and gathered supplies for battered women living in shelters. Mama Wheeler is the mother of two, grandmother of 12, great grandmother of 40, great-great grandmother of 60, and even great-great-great grandmother of two. The centenarians were all interviewed by Sacramento State Gerontology students for a video made for the event and each were given a copy.

The Centenarian Celebration Committee members were Garner, Peggy Forseth-Andrews, Sarah Richey, Charlene Archuleta, Deon Batchelder, Ron Clyma, Celia Esquivel, Sylvia Glynn-Marchi, Janet Heath, Kathy Xiong and Lisa Smith-Youngs.

The event sponsors included Wells Fargo Bank, AARP, Paratransit, Inc., The Sacramento City Fire Department, the Sacramento Metropolitan Fire District, SAFE Credit Union, Seniors Against Investment Fraud, Kaiser Permanente, Cimino Senior Care Management and Eskaton Senior Residences and Services.

Know of a local centenarian that should be recognized during the 2007 event? Contact Take A Stand Against Elder Abuse at (916) 874-9987.

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Contact: Brian LaMoure  
1-406-444-7782  
Blamoure@mt.gov

## Montana Centenarians' Search

The Governor's Advisory Council on Aging would like to honor all Montanans that are 100 years of age or older, or will turn 100 this year, centenarians, at the 40th annual Governors' Conference on Aging May 20<sup>th</sup>, 21<sup>st</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> 2008 in Helena, at the Colonial Red Lion Motel.

The theme of the conference is: Creative Aging - A Community Challenge. Montana's 2000 census showed that we had 162 centenarians and it is estimated by 2025, we will have over 3,000. By recognizing our eldest of the elders and honoring them we hope to raise the public's awareness of the baby boom generation which is turning 62 years old. If any Centenarians are able to attend the conference on Tuesday May 20<sup>th</sup>, we will honor them at our Centenarians luncheon.

All Centenarians' who reply will receive a Centenarian's recognition proclamation from the Governors Advisory Council on Aging. If you are a Centenarian or know one and would like them to be recognized, please supply us the following information by April 30, 2008.

Please send a photo of centenarian and reply to the following:

1. Name and address. How old are you?
2. Where and when were you born? If not born in Montana, what is your story on how you got to Montana?
3. What is your secret to living to be 100?
4. What has been the most wonderful event in your life that you would like to share?
5. What do you think of the television, telephone and computer?
6. What is your favorite quote or saying?
7. What else would you like us to know?
8. Will you be attending the luncheon? Please RSVP if possible.

Please send your information to:

Brian LaMoure  
DPHHS - SLTC  
PO Box 4210  
Helena MT 59604-4210

Or to Blamoure@mt.gov and be sure to check out the Conferences web site at [www.aging.mt.gov](http://www.aging.mt.gov) for more information.

**The New York Times**  
nytimes.com

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August 21, 1988

## In the Capital, the Party of the Century

By MEGAN O'MATZ, SPECIAL TO THE NEW YORK TIMES

LEAD: In her spare time, Etta Virginia Luck Jones said, she does nothing.

In her spare time, Etta Virginia Luck Jones said, she does nothing.

"I worked all the days of my life," she said, "and I think I'm old enough now to do nothing."

No one disagreed. Last month Mrs. Jones celebrated her 102d birthday. On Wednesday she was one of 25 centenarians in Washington to be honored at an afternoon reception by Mayor Marion S. Barry Jr. and his wife, Effi.

"I know that if you live long enough you're going to get old," Mr. Barry said in a banquet room of the Mayflower Hotel. "But I recognize that age ain't nothing but a number." Number of Centenarians on Rise

This was the second year the District of Columbia has honored residents whose ages reached into the triple digits.

Washington, along with a handful of states, Tennessee, Arizona and Connecticut, and Puerto Rico, is active in recognizing centenarians, whose numbers are increasing as the American population ages.

In 1980 Washington had 139 centenarians, according to the Census Bureau. By 1990 that number is expected to swell to 200. But statisticians said the numbers could be much higher because of poor record-keeping a century ago.

"My grandmother recorded her birth date in the family Bible," said Mr. Barry.

Last year the Mayor honored nine centenarians in conjunction with a national celebration coordinated by the National Institute on Aging. This year the city decided to identify other centenarians and expand its celebration. It located 43, although only 25 were able to attend the ceremony, billed as a "Salute to District Centenarians." Goes to Church, and Votes

Mrs. Jones attributed her longevity to "serving the Lord." While she said she does nothing, her relatives said she was being modest.

They said she is active in the Mount Zion Pentecostal Church and is highly opinionated. She also enjoys watching television and is diligent about voting in all local and Federal elections.

In 1916 she served as the supervisor of more than 35 public schools in Pittsylvania County, Va., earning \$44 a month.

In the 1940's, she and her husband, Alexander, purchased a 28-acre farm in Manassas, Va., and later sold it to open a small grocery store in the District. Mr. Jones died in 1969.

Mrs. Jones, who lives in an apartment and has round-the-clock nursing care, was more eager to talk about her family. Of her 9 children, 5 are alive, and she has 14 grandchildren and 14 great-grandchildren.

"This one here is teaching school in New York," she said of a granddaughter. "Or was," Mrs. Jones added, correctly, after a moment. The granddaughter, Joyce S. Harris, works for Delegate Walter E. Fauntroy, Democrat of the District of Columbia. No matter. "I'm very proud of all of them," Mrs. Jones said. Oldest in Group is 112

Mayor Barry presented each centenarian with a gold lapel pin in the shape of the numeral 100 and a \$100 gift certificate for Safeway Stores Inc., a grocery chain.

Mrs. Barry said the "lady of the hour" was Washington's oldest resident, Gertrude Long, who attended the celebration with her daughter, a friend, a nurse, a granddaughter and three of her 43 great-grandchildren. Mrs. Long is 112.

The reception cost the city more than \$5,000 for the gifts, a band, limousine service for those who had no other means of transportation, and a meal of cold fruits, sauteed vegetables, Swedish meatballs, sandwiches, imported cheeses, punch and a four-tier cake. While the banquet room itself was air-conditioned, the temperature outside seemed to cooperate with the theme of the day: 101 degrees in the afternoon.

The reception was an elaborate effort, aimed not only to commend local centenarians but to dispel notions that one's twilight years must be fraught with sickness and frailty.

Lillie B. Reeves, 104 years old and dressed in a pink dress with a white collar and pearls, wrestled a microphone from Mr. Barry to sing "How Great Thou Art," in a voice strong with emotion. She received a standing ovation. While many of the celebrants sat in wheelchairs, George Ernest Echols, who is 104 years old, jumped to his feet and waved his arms in the air as he was introduced by Mrs. Barry.

"Well, I tell you," said Mr. Echols, "I love life."

He, too, received a loud and resounding round of applause. Turnout Called 'Phenomenal'

"To think that in the heat yesterday 25 of these centenarians were able to get to this one place was phenomenal," Barbara A. Katzman, public affairs specialist with the National Institute on Aging, said today.

The Institute on Aging is part of the National Institutes of Health, which is itself 101 years old.

In a study conducted last year, the Institute on Aging reported a steady growth in the number of people at least 100 years old.

In 1980, the number of centenarians nationwide was about 15,000. In 1986 it had grown to about 25,000.

The Census Bureau predicts that the number of centenarians will grow to more than 100,000 by the year 2000.

But Courtney B. Williams, the city's community planner for the Office on Aging said the chance of becoming a centenarian in Washington is "one of the lowest in the country compared with other states."

He attributed this to poor nutrition and a high stress rate among people in the District. "People outside the city seem to be a lot healthier," he said.

Of the centenarians at the reception, 11 live with their families or at home with nursing care. The remaining 14 reside in nursing homes.

Women outnumbered the men, 19 to 6, a statistic that prompted some good-natured ribbing from the Mayor, who acknowledged that his own age was "past a half a century."

"I don't know what you women do to us," Mr. Barry said to laughter, "but seeing these six men here gives me hope."

# National Centenarian Awareness Project

Founded in 1989 by Lynn Peters Adler, J.D.  
*Centenarian Expert and Older Adults Advocate*



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CELEBRATING CENTENARIANS

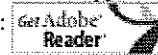
*John W. Donnelly, 100*

John does the honors of his 100th

John W. Donnelly, born in 1906 in Iowa, is a table tennis champ. A past National Senior Games Champion and a gold medal winner in the Florida Senior Games State Championships, John is headed to the National Senior Games in Louisville, Kentucky, this month. He is the oldest table tennis player in the Games.

John began playing table tennis in high school. After college, in the 1930s, he became a stock broker in Iowa and retired his position for 30 years. In 1990, John moved to Florida and founded a table tennis club in the community in which he lives. He still plays four to five times per week.

To print out the June 2007 calendar you must have *Adobe Acrobat Reader* installed on your computer. If you do not have *Adobe Acrobat Reader*, you can download a copy free of charge from the Adobe website. Just click on this icon:



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## John W. Donnelly, 100

John W. Donnelly, born in September of 1906 in Iowa, is a table tennis champ. A past National Senior Games Champion and a gold medal winner in the Florida Senior Games State Championships, John is headed to the National Senior Games in Louisville, Kentucky, in June. He is the oldest table tennis player in the 2007 Games.

John began playing table tennis



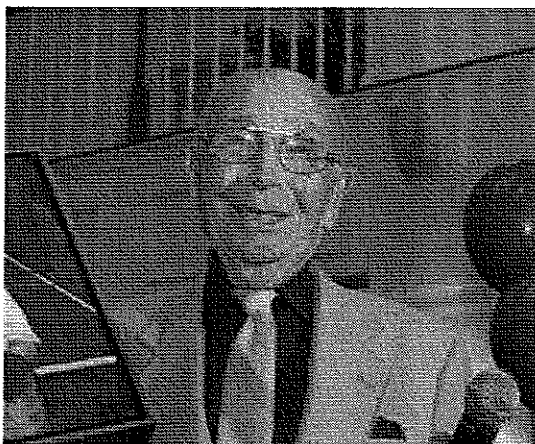
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in high school. After college, in the 1920s, he became a stock broker in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, and retired his paddle for 30 years. In 1980, John moved to Florida and founded a table tennis club in the community in which he lives. He still plays four to five times per week.

*John Donnelly on his 100th birthday.*

John and Marian, his wife, were married in June of 2001. In May 2006, John was invited to be a guest on *The Tonight Show with Jay Leno*. He and Marian flew to Burbank, Calif., where John and Leno played an abbreviated ping pong match.

Though John's official 100th birthday was not until September 23rd of 2006, he began celebrating after he turned 99. In June of 2006, the Donnellys spent nearly three weeks traveling throughout Europe. Both love the arts and their calendar is booked with dates to upcoming ballets, symphonies and other cultural events.

NCAP founder Lynn Adler attended John's 100th birthday celebration in Florida and presented John with a certificate from NCAP, recognizing his achieving 100 years of age.

*Click on images below for larger images of John and his 100th birthday party.*



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