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'Super-seniors' mark 100-plus years

BEVERLY | Birthday party honors 10 centenarians

BY MARY HOULIHAN

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Ten centenarians had a rock star moment Sunday afternoon during a birthday celebration at Smith Village, a retirement community in the Beverly neighborhood.

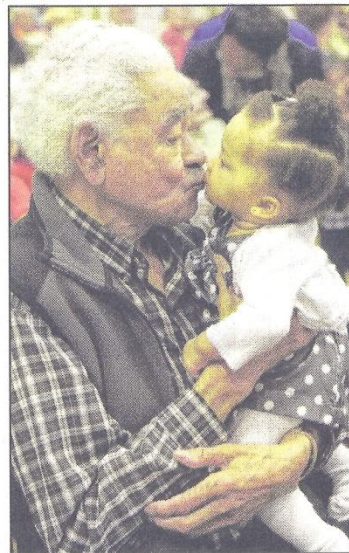
As television cameras hovered and reporters asked questions, the seniors ate cake, drank punch and talked about their long lives.

"I take every day as it comes," said Ann McGowan, 102, adding her secret to longevity is "hard work, proper food and a little drink once in a while."

The super-seniors were honored with a large and colorful birthday cake and plaques that read in part "You inspire us to be great and brave and strong like you. . . . We honor who you are, we honor what you have done."

Joy Shields, the community's life enrichment director, says she was surprised to find so many centenarians at Smith Village.

"We were shocked that there were so many residents who had



Jim Williamson, 100, holds his granddaughter Arryn Barton at Smith Village in Beverly on Sunday.

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reached that momentous age," Shields said. "It's such a huge accomplishment, and we wanted to celebrate it with family and friends."

There were 96,000 100-year-olds across the country in 2010, according to the Social Security Admin-



Helen Kutschke, 100, read an original poem to kick off the special birthday celebration.

istration, up from 37,000 only 20 years ago. And experts feel that as baby boomers age, the numbers will only increase.

Several centenarians warned the "youngsters" in the crowd to live life to the fullest.

"The years go by so very fast," said 100-year-old Helen Kutschke, who read an original poem to open the ceremony. "I look back now and wonder where did the time go."

Jim Williamson, a former funeral director who once played semi-

professional baseball and lived in Bronzeville, was content sitting with his 8-month-old granddaughter, Arryn, who was equally content in his arms.

"He's really cool and laid back," said his daughter, Amy Barton, smiling at the picture they made. "And very inspirational."

Bernice Gorell's daughters Karen Goralesski and Kathy Walrath said their mother was a "woman before her time."

Gorell, 100, worked alongside her husband at a Chicago travel agency that also helped people with immigration issues.

"Dad always said mother was the brains, and without her he would be nowhere," Goralesski said. "She was a very dynamic woman and ahead of her time in those days."

They also both agreed that their mother, who sported pearl-drop earrings and a sparkling ring, still likes a little bling.

"She always said you can't be too thin, too rich or have too much jewelry," Walrath said, laughing. "She's accessorized every day of her life. And both her daughters have followed on that path."

Contributing: *Scripps Howard News Service*