A Century On This Earth

Tuesday, 21 October 2008

{audio}/images/stories/mp3/081021.florence_welch_100th.mp3{/audio}

Florence Welch, seated, is surrounded by friends and family at her 100th birthday celebration Saturday. (Jay Barrett photo)

Jay Barrett/KMXT

There is a very special birthday in Kodiak today. Florence Welch, who's lived on the island since 1947, turns 100 years old. Jay Barrett has more.

The friends and family of Florence Welch - some coming from as far away as California - gathered on Saturday at the American Legion hall in downtown Kodiak to celebrate her century of life. Kodiak Senior Center Director Pat Branson welcomed the hall full of people to the birthday party:

-- (Birthday 1 20 sec "Welcome to this wonderful ... a remarkable life.")

Welch was born 100 years ago today, on October 21st, 1908, to Ike and Sabra (say-bra) Taylor in Alexandria, Louisiana. She married her husband John in 1941, and after World War Two, he took a job at the Kodiak Naval Base, which is now the largest Coast Guard base in the nation. After his 18-month contract was up, they decided to stay and make a life for themselves on the last frontier.

The couple became very active in the community, joining the Lions Club and being on the board of Kodiak Head Start:

-- (Birthday 2 43 sec "She was involved with ... life we should all aspire to.")

She was also politically active. Mrs. Welch was born before women in American had the right to vote, and even longer before it was common for African-Americans to be allowed to vote in the Deep South. Once in Kodiak she and her husband became involved in Democratic Party politics. She attended the inaugurations of Jimmy Carter and Bill Clinton, and has recently been seen in a "Kodiak for Obama" t-shirt. Her cousin, Rose Milam, was a delegate to the Democratic National Convention from California this year, and flew up to Kodiak for the celebration:

-- (Birthday 3 56 sec "I'm so happy to be here ... I love to talk, also.")

Chester Mitchell also flew to Kodiak for the celebration. He is married to Mrs. Welch's niece, Josie:

-- (Birthday 4 37 sec "Good evening, my name ... we'll see you again.")

Doctor Bob Johnson said when he returned to Kodiak, Mrs. Welch and his mother had become good friends, and he soon got to know her as well:

-- (Birthday 5 32 sec "I was her doctor before ... mother and the church.")

(Birthday 6 XX fade up Happy Birthday)

I'm Jay Barrett.

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