

Fieldhome Resident Celebrates 100th Birthday

By Art Cusano

YORKTOWN - Very few people get see a century pass before their eyes, but Erminia Pilato is one of them.

The Fieldhome nursing home threw a party for Pilato, one of its residents, in celebration of her 100th birthday Jan 13, complete with pizza, cake and live music.

"I said I wasn't going to have a party, but then I decided I might as well," Pilato said as she sang along to the music.

Pilato said she likes living at Fieldhome.

"They're very nice to me," Pilato said. "My family is gone, so this is my family now."

Pilato was born in on Jan. 16, 1911 in Harlem, one of six girls and two boys. She later worked as a seamstress in the Bronx for many years.

"I was a dress designer," Pilato said. "I went to college for two years to be a dress designer."

The former seamstress took pride in her work and won a national award for it when she was in her fifties.

"They took one person from each company, from about 600 companies all throughout the United States," Pilato said. "Guess who won? I was shocked. I was the best dress maker in the whole country."

Today she has taken up crocheting to keep herself busy.

"I make blankets, I make scarves, I give them to people," Pilato said.

And she has found other ways to keep herself busy.

"I started playing bingo, I started singing - I love singing," she said. "In the place, I used to work. I always used to sing all day long. Now I'm singing and I sound better all the time."

Pilato also loves to cook, and would often wake up early in the morning to cook for over a dozen family members on holidays.

"I would get up at 4 o'clock in the morning because I didn't like cooking the night before," Pilato said. "I would do all the cooking and I wouldn't let anyone take gifts from nobody."

Pilato's life has also been curiously touched by the number 16.

"I was born on the 16th, my husband died on the 16th, I got married on the 16th and I bought a car on the 16th," Pilato said. "My brother-in-law died on the 16th. But when I play bingo and play 16, I don't win. Why?"

Pilato's great-niece, Donna Albanese, who attended the party with her daughters, Jennifer and Christina, said her aunt was always warm and personable.

"Whenever we go to restaurants, she's always saying hello to people she doesn't know," Pilato said. "She's very fun-loving, very caring."

Longevity runs in her family, with her mother living until the age of 96, but Albanese thinks there is more to her long life.

"I think her secret is that she helped people her whole life," Albanese said. "Whenever someone was sick, she would always be there and never think twice, and I think God is rewarding her."