

The Dalles Chronicle Local News

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Fit at 101

Rodger Nichols

Gilia Peruzzo of The Dalles, who turned 101 Sept. 15, celebrated a different occasion Thursday. She was at the top of the list for the first annual Senior Leadership Awards from the Governor's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports, according to council member Tom Faszholz, who presented the award.

"You are a tremendous example," he said in presenting the award. "Through your enjoyment of life and active lifestyle, you have been an example and an inspiration, not only for other people in your community, but for all the citizens of Oregon. The certificate is in recognition of your contribution to the welfare of Oregon citizens."

Faszholz explained that the senior leadership award came from nominations received from senior centers and retirement homes from around the state.

"Gilia has been a wonderful model in the senior community and at Mill Creek Point," said Mill Creek Point's Bonnigene Cloud, who nominated Peruzzo. "Gilia participates every day in the exercise class, along with walking and gardening." Her current prize is a large pumpkin that is the subject of a guess-the-weight-of-the-pumpkin contest at the facility.

"On occasion, she walks to the store," said Cloud. "She tells her friends, 'If I can exercise at 101, so can the rest of you.'"

Peruzzo was born in San Vito, Italy in 1908. She remembers Austrian and German soldiers invading Italy, which was on the allied side in World War I. She also remembers seeing her first American flag when a company of American soldiers camped near her family home.

The family immigrated to America in 1919 and settled in California. She was married to Jack Peruzzo in 1925 and became a citizen in 1933. Her husband worked on the Oakland –San Francisco Bay Bridge during the Great Depression, and was later transferred to the Portland area. The two were married for more than 50 years; he died in 1979.

Peruzzo had been active in the League of Women Voters and the drive to start **Clackamas Community College**. She eventually moved to The Dalles, where her son Peter Peruzzo had established his medical practice.

Peruzzo was clearly pleased by the award.

"This is an honor," she said, "a great honor."

Asked if she had anything to say for the story, she told the following story:

"When I was very little, my mother was walking, and a priest was there, and she said to the priest, 'This is my 13th baby.' I had seven brothers and there were six of us sisters, and I was the last one. So the priest thought that was an unlucky number for me. My mother said, 'No, this is the lucky one,' and I have been the lucky one to live to be 101."