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## Elsie Battaglia is already planning 101st birthday party

*Friends, fun and family fill the entire day on Dec. 12*

BY BARBARA SHERMAN

*The Regal Courier, Dec 29, 2011, Updated Dec 29, 2011*

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The couple had two baby boys, but when Elsie was 23, Bob, who had had rheumatic fever as a child, died.

"Three months later, they came out with penicillin," Elsie said. "That probably would have saved him."

Elsie continued to work for her father-in-law as the Rex Arms property manager.

"Then he got me into a six-plex, and I started buying, fixing up and selling duplexes and six-plexes," said Elsie, who could be called one of the original real estate flippers. "The real estate market was good."

While raising her boys and working, Elsie also started the first Oregon chapter of Sigma Phi Gamma International Sorority in 1940.

The organization was founded in 1920 as a non-academic friendship sorority with the purpose of promoting true friendship among women throughout the world, to work for higher standards among young people and to perform service work whenever possible, according to its website.

Elsie founded the Gamma chapter; she later switched to the Lambda Nu chapter and is now in the Iota Delta chapter, whose members have a combined total of 300 years of service.

"It saved my life," Elsie said of the time she founded her first chapter. "I was so lonely after my husband died. A young widow was fair game in those days. Women didn't want their husbands around me, but the last thing I wanted was a man."

"When I got into the sorority, it was a godsend. It gave me a purpose and friends. I jumped in it with both feet and eventually became the international president."

Once her boys became teenagers, Elsie thought they needed a father figure, even just to learn how to tie ties; 10 years after being widowed, Elsie met and married Sam Battaglia. They eventually divorced but remained friends, and he died 21 years after they first got married.

Elsie, never one to let grass grow under her feet, took up golf and didn't just learn to play, she also operated a golf course with some friends.

"Before that, I couldn't afford it or spend the time it took," she said.

Elsie was living in Ocean Park, Wash., at the time and couldn't find anyone to play bridge. Always enterprising, she put an ad in the local paper, recruited some women and started a bridge club. Then she started a chapter of Sigma Phi Gamma.

Someone wanted Elsie to start a nine-hole women's golf club at the local municipal course and offered them free lessons, but after the pro insulted her, there were no lessons.

"We got lessons somewhere else and started playing golf," Elsie said. "Then the lease for the golf course came up, and no one wanted to take it over. Our group decided we could mow the grass and sell concessions and run the course ourselves."

With a few of the women's husbands to help with mowing, the group made so much money in a year that they "retired" from running the course and all had their golf fees paid for the next year.

Elsie spent 25 years going to Desert Hot Springs in the winter, where she enjoyed the weather, played golf and made good friends. In 1992, she took the gold medal in the Palm Springs Senior Olympics.

"I'm not very proud of it," she said. "It's a nine-hole course, and anyone who was standing and breathing after walking around it got a gold medal."

Elsie, who had moved to the Highlands, moved into King City in 1995. She started to lose her eyesight and finally had to give up driving and golf, but in 2007 Elsie met Claudia, who helps her with day-to-day activities and joking refers to herself as "Elsie's seeing-eye dog."

Elsie is willing to share her secret for what she believes has kept her going strong for so long - every morning she eats nine white raisins that have marinated in "good quality" gin.

Elsie claims the concoction keeps away aches and pains, including an old collarbone injury that occurred when as a child she was riding with her grandfather in a horse and buggy. The horse got spooked, and the two of them fell out of the buggy and landed in a ditch.

Elsie broke her collarbone, which she mentioned to doctors when she was in the hospital recently.

One of the doctors smiled and said, "Elsie, we don't hear about too many injuries from horse-and-buggy accidents around here."

If Elsie has one lament, it might be that she didn't choose the right birth date.

"I was born at home, and the doctor came to the house, but there was no birth certificate," she said. "Years later, I got a job at the state Board of Health, and they told me to type out a birth certificate and have the doctor sign it. I could have put any date on it, and Social Security was just starting, so I thought about the advantages of being born in different years."

"I ended up putting down my real birthdate, but now I wish I had changed it by one year so I would turn 100 on 12/12/12 instead of 101."

Nevertheless, Elsie is already planning for her party on 12/12/12, and it's going to be a big one.

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