



MISSISSIPPI STATE HOSPITAL

P.O. Box 157-A, Whitfield, MS 39193
Phone (601) 351-8018 Fax (601) 351-8364
www.msh.state.ms.us

For Immediate Release

March 19, 2010

Contact: Adam Moore (601) 351-8262, adam.moore@msh.state.ms.us

JAQUITH NURSING HOME RESIDENT CELEBRATES 99 YEARS

WHITFIELD— For some people, big birthday parties begin to lose their appeal after big milestones – 25, 21, or sometimes even after the Sweet 16, but Edward Gray usually has a pretty nice birthday party every year.

This year, though, the Jaquith Nursing Home resident's family went all out for his party. And rightfully so, since it was one of those milestones. Edward celebrated his 99th birthday on January 17 in the B-71 Conference Center on the Mississippi State Hospital Campus.

“He usually has a big birthday party every year. He's had that for a while,” said his daughter, Edwina Brown. “But we decided to do something a little bigger this year.”

That “something a little bigger” turned into an all-out family reunion, with family coming from literally all over the country to attend. Family members came from Chicago, Cleveland, New Orleans, Washington D.C. and California, as well as from cities across Mississippi like Prentiss and Mount Olive.

“We've had family reunions every couple of years, but not in a while,” Edwina said. “So this was a birthday party and a family reunion. We had cake, and plenty of food. There was lots and lots of food, and lots of decorations.”

When it came time for the guest of honor to make his grand entrance, Edward made sure he came in style. Even though a recent bout of pneumonia has left him weak, Edward said he wasn't going to be rolled into his 99th birthday party in a wheelchair; he wanted to walk in on his own.

“He wanted to walk in, so he made his grand entrance on a walker,” said Judith Brown, another daughter.

It was only fitting, considering how much he had been looking forward to it. While his family was spreading the word amongst themselves and their friends, Edward was doing his own part to let people know about his party.

“He went and passed out some invitations himself,” Judith said.

That way, some of his friends and co-residents in Madison Inn got to come enjoy the party as well. It was especially good though, for him to see one guest in particular.

One of his childhood friends, Garfield Griffin, who turned 99 on Feb. 15, was able to come to the celebration. The two of them had grown up together and been friends practically all their lives. It's not too often, Edwina said, that two childhood friends like that get to see each other celebrate their 99th birthday.

After a lifetime together, the pair had lost touch during the three years Edward has been living at Jaquith Nursing Home. As soon as they got together though, it was like times hadn't changed.

"It was good for both of them," Edwina said. "Their memories are sharp as a tack, both of them. Matter of fact, we'll call him if there's something we can't remember."

The rest of the party went great, with guests from all over enjoying themselves and each others' company. Reverend Barbria Martin was the speaker, and there were a lot of people who remember him being known as the "Pea Man," back from his vegetable growing days, when he would travel to the farmer's market twice a day.

Judith said the highlight for her was when one of Edward's granddaughters brought tears to his eyes after she talked about how his working in his garden had inspired her and showed her how to work for the things she wanted.

With this year now behind them, the family now has to figure out how to top this party next year – Edward will be 100 years old, an even bigger milestone than 99.

"We're not sure how, but we're already talking about it," Edwina said.

Edward said the highlight for him was simple, and something that will probably happen next year, too.

"Having all my family there," he said.

Founded in 1976, Jaquith Nursing Home is a 479-bed long-term care facility dedicated to serving individuals who are in need of nursing care in a safe and comfortable therapeutic environment. The nursing home is located on the 350-acre campus of Mississippi State Hospital at Whitfield. JNH is accredited by The Joint Commission.

- 30 -

PHOTO ATTACHED:

Edward Gray, a former long time resident of Jefferson Davis County, recently celebrated his 99th birthday party in the Public Relations Conference Center at Mississippi State Hospital. Gray has lived at Jaquith Nursing Home, located on the MSH campus, for the past three years, and several relatives work at the hospital. Relatives came from all over the country for his party.