Betty Cellarius celebrated as Tuftonboro’s oldest citizen

BY ELISSA PAQUETTE
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TUFTONBORO — Betty Cellarius greeted members of the Tuftonboro Board of Selectmen warmly as they came through the door of her Melvin Village home on Nov. 22 to present her with a replica of the town’s Boston Post Cane. At age 96, Cellarius is the town’s oldest citizen.

Chairman Carolyn Sundquist handed her a bouquet of flowers. As Cellarius’s assistant, Tricia Bailey, turned to take care of the flowers, Cellarius offered her visitors coffee and invited them in to sit down.

Within minutes, Heather Tenney, owner of Curtis Quality Care, and manager of Cellarius’s small team of caregivers, pulled in the driveway and added another bright bouquet to the bunch.

Mary Elizabeth Cellarius, known as Betty, was born on July 17, 1917 in Dover, but she’s lived in Tuftonboro since the 1950s. The first house she and her late husband, Ken, lived in was next to the Melvin Village Community Church, then named The Free Will Baptist Church. The house burned while she and her husband, a firefighter, were attending church next door.

She’s lived along Route 109 in a white farmhouse near the intersection of 109A since then. She says she sees the doctor two times a year and she’s “holding her own,” doing what she thinks is best rather than always doing what he says.

She’s been a member of The Hikers for around 70 years, but she doesn’t drive anymore, so it’s more difficult for her to find transportation. When asked what her favorite activity is, she replies that she enjoys The Hikers’ social activities.

“It used to be more tied in to the church,” she muses, but times are different now. Most of the town is new people. “When I first came up here every one was like a big, happy family. You knew what your neighbors were having for dinner, and people could visit, and if no one was home, borrow what they needed and leave a note.

“The world has changed. Now you hardly know the person who lives next door.”

She recalls that her mother-in-law walked to the village picking up friends along the way to walk together all the way to Castle in the Clouds and then walk back.

Cellarius, whose mother was a nurse, as were two of her sisters and a cousin, called herself an “unofficial” nurse at the Elliot in Manchester. There weren’t too many career opportunities for females in her day other than nursing and teaching. She also helped out at the Carroll County Nursing Home. That’s where she saw the original Boston Post Cane.

In her family, says Cellarius, it was always important to give back to your community. She followed that principle by serving as a town ballot clerk for 10 years and loved it. “I saw everyone, had a little chat and got into the working of town government…I left at age 70… It’s important to give other people a turn to do it.”

“It’s been a good life,” she reflects. “There have been bad things and good things.” But that’s all part of life. It’s evident that for Cellarius, who invites the group to “always come and visit,” that she enjoys people, and it’s easy to see from the smiles on her caregivers’ faces that they enjoy her.
BETTY CELLARIUS of Melvin Village received applause upon receiving a replica of Tuftonboro’s Boston Post Cane from the Tuftonboro Board of Selectmen – , a tradition begun in 1909. Left to right behind Betty are caregivers Heather Tenney and Tricia Bailey, and Tuftonboro selectmen Dan Duffy, Lloyd Wood and Carolyn Sundquist.