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Woman, 95, stays active by volunteering at soup kitchen

By *THERESA CAMPBELL, DAILY SUN*

WILDWOOD -- Olive Watson strives to do what doctors advise. The petite 95-year-old walks two miles five days a week for exercise, stays active with church and volunteer work, and makes an effort to eat right --except for the occasional desserts too tempting to resist.

"I'm bad about eating sweet stuff," Watson chuckled while pitching in Tuesday at the Wildwood Soup Kitchen, where she volunteers every Tuesday from 7 a.m. until sometime in the afternoon.

"Until recently, I never had to watch what I ate," she said. "But my doctor told me during my physical last week to watch my sweets because it was getting a little out of control.

"I said, 'Geez, after all of these years.'"

But Watson did celebrate her 95th birthday not long ago, and yes, enjoyed a slice of birthday cake.

"No," she said, "I didn't feel guilty."

Watson has found that her age prompts many friends to ask her about the secrets of her longevity.

"I'm just staying busy, keeping active," she said. "People tell me that I'm an inspiration, but I think they say that just because I have lived so long."

Watson still drives and lives in her own home. She also loves going out and dining with friends.

Watson has been volunteering at the Wildwood Soup Kitchen, an ecumenical ministry on Barwick Street, for 2 1/2 years, and she cherishes the opportunity to serve others. She is the kitchen's oldest volunteer.

"I came down and asked if I could work," she said. "I enjoy the fellowship with the other volunteers. It's just a congenial group that works on Tuesday, and we do whatever has to be done."

Watson fills the food trays for the homebound deliveries and also serves guests who come through the food line.

"I feel like I'm being useful," she said.

Watson hopes to serve at the soup kitchen for as long as she is physically able.



**Olive Watson, left, and Mike Varga, right, prepare soup bowls for delivery from the Wildwood Soup Kitchen.
George Horsford / Daily Sun**

Her only child, George, 69, lives three miles away and visits her daily. He stopped by the soup kitchen Tuesday to see his favorite volunteer.

"She does great," George said, marveling at his mother's zest for life. "She's a good church worker. She loves to go and do, and she's very spry. I just hope if I live as long, I am in as good of shape."

Fellow food kitchen volunteers also are amazed.

"I had no idea she was 95 until somebody told me," said Mike Varga.

"She does more than we do sometimes," added Liz O'Brien. "She really is an inspiration, and she could pass for someone in her 60s. I've learned from her to 'just keep going; don't just sit at home.'"

Wildwood has been Watson's home since 1933, when she was 21 and married her husband Allen, a native Floridian and railroad conductor. Originally from Marion, Ohio, Watson moved with her family to Florida when she was 16. She was introduced to her husband by a friend.

She kept busy when her son, George, was young, volunteering for the local school system and serving as president of the parent-teacher association at her school. Later, she served as president of the Florida Conference of United Methodist Women. She has been active at the Wildwood United Methodist Church since 1934.

Watson said she feels most at home doing church work such as volunteering at the soup kitchen, which she finds immensely fulfilling.

Watson, whose grandmother lived to be 82, admits she is amazed by her own age.

"I just don't feel 95," she said, adding she is not about to sit back and dwell on it. "I'm just going to keep staying busy and active."

And when she celebrates more birthdays, Watson won't mind. It'll mean sweeter birthday cakes to enjoy.

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