

Betty Kiloh is 2013's precious Golden Girl

SEA CAVALCADE



Cathie Roy Photo

Betty Kiloh was named this year's Golden Girl during the Sea Cavalcade festival on Saturday. Kiloh was not on hand for the presentation as she was in St. Mary's Hospital recovering from some recent health issues.

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It's not every day St. Mary's Hospital gets to host royalty, but this weekend was a rare exception when Betty Kiloh, this year's Gibsons' Golden Girl, received her title in her hospital room.

Kiloh, who has had some health challenges over the past month and a half, was delighted and "shocked" to be chosen by the Gibsons Heritage Society for the award, but the choice comes as no surprise to the 55 fellow St. Mary's Auxiliary members who co-signed her nomination letter.

Kiloh, a pioneer of the area, is an amazing woman well on her way to celebrating her 90th birthday. Her first foray to the Coast was in 1940 to visit her almost in-laws. On Sept. 4, 1942, she married Arthur Kiloh, and they spent their honeymoon weekend watching a cottage being built.

She recalled the newlyweds chatting about the construction and the materials the builders were using.

"We said, 'aren't those people fancy? They're using real good quality plywood on their cottage.' When we took our picnic lunch down to Soames from Granthams, we thought wouldn't it be nice if we could have a place like this in the future. Well, we did get a cottage and it's still the same cottage. We've made it cozier, but it's still the same," she reminisced.

Kiloh was originally slated to take nurse's training at Vancouver General Hospital; however, when Arthur joined the army and asked Betty to marry him before he reported for duty, her plans changed. They married within the three weeks; and her caregiving took another path.

During the war she worked for three years in Vancouver and provided support for her new in-laws while their only son served in the Second World War. During that time she helped the parents buy their first home on the Coast in Granthams.

"With Art overseas, [Betty] began her quest as a true ambassador to the Coast by bringing soldiers' wives or their girlfriends to Granthams to have letter writing weekends to their overseas men. Granthams became 'camp' to many," the nomination letter noted.

Since coming to the Coast full time, Kiloh has been involved in many volunteer organizations. She has worked "tirelessly" for the hospital auxiliary, the Royal Canadian Legion Branch No. 109 in Gibsons as well as helped any friend, family member or neighbour who needed a helping hand.

"She arrives with her delicious baking, and she and her car are always ready to pick up those who need a friendly face to visit and to listen.

"Betty is insightful and has a great sense of humour. She is kind, understanding and steady and has an incredible grasp of what is right or wrong and knows how to make things better. No amount of mere superlatives could adequately describe her character," the letter stated.

As well loved as she is by the Auxiliary and the Legion, which also submitted a letter recommending her as Golden Girl, Kiloh's family comes first in her life. A loving letter from her daughter, Christy Kiloh, described her parent as the "best mother." Her letter itemized the many contributions Betty made to her children's schooling and extra-circular activities over the years.

For her part, Betty is amazed at the support she's had from her family of four children, six grandchildren and five great-grandchildren since going into the hospital in June.

"Not a day goes by that one of them hasn't been here."

She received her tiara and wand from the granddaughter of a friend who wanted to make sure "Queen" Betty had all the right accoutrements.

Our newest royal considers herself fortunate to live in the community and country she does.

"We are so lucky in our community. Other areas can't believe we're able to have this medical equipment. I could never in a million years have paid for this [medical treatment]."

For now she's looking forward to a glass of scotch in her own home with her neighbours to celebrate her new title, and next year she plans to be at Sea Cavalcade to wear her sash in good health.