Stone Phillips helps center celebrate anniversary

Stone Phillips poses for a photo with Michelle Madigan and Lois Celeste at the Diamond Anniversary celebration for the Adult and Senior Center of Saratoga Thursday. PHOTOS PROVIDED BY HEATHER BOHM-TALLMAN

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Johnny Rich dancing with mother Patty Riggi PHOTOS PROVIDED BY HEATHER BOHM-TALLMAN

The glistening raindrops last Thursday evening only added more sparkle to the Diamond Anniversary celebration for the Adult and Senior Center of Saratoga. Executive director Lois Celeste and event chair Mary Lentini welcomed lead sponsors arriving early at the Canfield Casino for a special
Stone Phillips helps center celebrate anniversary

The broadcast journalist cast a spotlight on aging through the 2014 documentary, “Moving with Grace,” a film sharing his parents’ transition from an independent living facility in their long-time home of St. Louis, to a similar place in North Carolina, closer to family.

Senior Center supporters like Patty Riggi, Kathy Goodwin, Ray and Francine Apy, Augusta Martin, Ray Bryan, Steve von Schenk and Brendan O’Hara chatted with Phillips, who was every bit as poised and personable as he appears on television. Others took a look at the Center’s first 60 years, presented by the John B. Moore Documentary Studies Collaborative (MDOCS). Five Skidmore College MDOCS’ students spent over a year and a half collecting and sorting articles, newsletters, photographs and more. The result is a comprehensive exhibit chronicling the birth, growth and history of this community treasure.

By 7 p.m., the festivities were in full swing and the Casino parlor burst with excitement. Spotted were Mary Martin, Lisa and Tim Higgins, Brendan Flanigan, Paul and Meredith von Schenk, Tommy and Rachel Uccellini, Gayle LaSalle, Amy Raimo, Erika O’Donnell, Mark Hogan and newly re-elected Finance Commissioner Michele Madigan. At the bar, Susan Brienza Gordon and her husband Charles toasted the anniversary with friends Donna and Joe Herman, while Michele and Ron Riggi caught up with Bill and Susan Dake.

Music from The Accents lured the crowd into the ballroom where Old Daley Catering had set gourmet dinner stations. The ever-gracious Stephanie Pettit and her team encouraged everyone to move to dinner tables before Stone Phillips took the stage. With humor, he shared the story of first talking to Celeste about being part of the event, and his own appreciation for the all the Adult and Senior Center of Saratoga does, as he witnessed it firsthand earlier that day.

Phillips then spoke of his parents and how grateful he is to have video of them, to have captured both as themselves, before his mother’s dementia progressed. The audience was treated to clips from Vic and Grace Phillips’ 70th wedding anniversary, and the sweetness of them singing “A Bushel and a Peck” with the kind of love that only comes after seven decades together. After the video, Phillips remarked that his father died of a stroke within a year of that marriage milestone, at age 96. His mother is still alive, but Alzheimer’s has claimed the woman he once knew.

“No, we relate moment to moment, less as mother and son, but more as human being to human being,” Phillips commented. “There is something kind of nice about every moment being fresh, though. Some say that learning to start over is a difficult life lesson, but one of the most valuable. And we do it every time we meet.”

Speaking of valuable lessons, three “Sensational Seniors” in Saratoga have set an example for all to follow. In a special video salute underwritten by

http://www.saratogian.com/article/ST/20151116/NEWS/151119737
Fingerpaint, the evening recognized Joseph Almeida, Robert DeSio and Sheila O’Connell for their outstanding contributions as community volunteers. The trio was selected by a committee, led by Dee Sarno, which reviewed countless nominations submitted from local organizations. Detailing the process, Celeste commented, “Dee Sarno is actually the most sensational senior I know. We’re so grateful for her time and dedication to this effort.”

With the program concluded, The Accents kicked it up a notch and the dance floor came alive. Just as busy was Heather Bohm-Tallman’s “Diamonds are Forever” photo booth. Among those posing were Elizabeth Macy, Cheri Monaco, Andrew and Kate Jarosh, David and Traci Jersen, Sequoyah Finkell, Nancy Bambara, Nicole Buck, Kris Wurl and Michelle Hicks. The props, including oversized diamond rings, provided endless fun. But the person who may have had the best time that night was Leona Beck. She went home with real diamonds, the lucky winner of the pendant raffle from Connelly’s Diamond Gallery.

While the gala may be over and the Diamond Anniversary past, the Adult and Senior Center of Saratoga continues to shine every day. Thanking sponsors and sharing the news that more than $60,000 was raised, Celeste stated, “The Saratoga Senior Center’s 60th Anniversary celebration met all of our expectations! It was an honor to welcome Stone Phillips who was extraordinary as he highlighted the importance of our seniors and helped us raise awareness for the Center, its history and its mission. Over 100 Senior Center members joined us and we were thrilled to recognize our Sensational Senior award winners.”

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