

La Mesan grateful to cele

It was more than a birthday party as friends and loved ones of Mary-Em Howard of La Mesa gathered Jan. 8 at St. Francis Center at the San Diego Mission to help her celebrate.

A little redhead abounding with energy greeted the world 75 years ago and she has not slowed down much since then. As she welcomed one person to her birthday celebration, she would spy another newcomer and off she would go, flitting from one corner of the room to the other, not at all resembling someone who had just battled cancer.

"This is a thanksgiving party for the prayers that helped heal me," said Howard, referring to her surgery last summer. The outpouring of love she received was such that she wanted to complete the circle and thank those who had prayed for and with her.

This meant a full house, as more than 300 guests were instructed to find the card they had sent during her illness. She had them all displayed on a huge board.

Much to her delight, all six of her children were present. In fact, they told her she was not to do a thing. If anyone needed anything, they would take care of it. Her daughter, Sister Mary Peace, flew in from St. Louis to spend a few short days with her. The oldest, John Howard, who just



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People in action

moved back from Idaho, was on hand. Also joining the festivities were, Don Howard, and his wife, Debbie, who live in Spring Valley.

Grandchildren Lynn, Matthew, Timothy and Kimberly were there with their dad, Mark Howard (all of La Mesa). Kathleen (Howard) Thompson and her husband, Ralph, came in from Torrance, Calif. The youngest daughter, Terri (Howard) Cameron from Aliso Viejo, was there as well.

Mark Howard thanked everyone for coming and toasted his mother, saying "We all love you."

To touch the periphery of Howard's life is to be drawn into the center of it.

There is always room for one more friend, to which this group attested. She picked up each one along the volunteer road she has traveled. They came from Mercy

Hospital Auxiliary, the Social Service, the Salvation Army Auxiliary, the American Cancer Society, the choirs of St. John's and St. Patrick's Catholic Churches and a myriad of other organizations and from all points north, south and east. In fact, as she greeted and hugged her guests, she could not pass up the opportunity to take care of a little business, discussing the entertainment for the American Cancer Society's function with Esther Williams' son, Ben Gage, and his wife, Patty.

Green plants in tiny pink pots shaped the numbers 75 at the entrance, in case anyone was in doubt. Throughout the evening the guest book was manned by her good friends Virginia Fletcher-Hawk, Rosanne Chipp and Helen Davis, all of El Cajon, and Elanor Herzman of San Diego.

Howard read a poem to everyone depicting the good things that happen when special people come into your life; ending with, "they teach you how to live, and you all are the special people in my life."

People are usually forewarned not to tell Howard any secrets. "A woman who will tell her age will tell anything," she said.

Enjoying the finger sandwiches, punch and delicious chocolate mousse cake with shaved white

celebrate another year of life



Mary Jane Urlaub/*The Daily Californian*

Mary-Em Howard of La Mesa celebrates her 75th birthday with her children. Gathered for the party are, from left, Don Howard, Kathleen Thompson, Mark Howard, Mary-Em Howard, Terri Cameron, John Howard and Sister Mary Peace.

chocolate and a layer of ice cream were a number of prominent East Countians. They included La Mesans Mary and Bob Shevlin and Annette and Joseph Fritzenkotter; El Cajon residents Hilda Ridout, Kathy Wragg, Sylvia Tagwerker, Donna and Norman Wollitz, Nancy and Milt White and Kathy and Ralph Allen; and, from Del Cerro, Margaret Freder-

icks, Donna Guttman and Barbara McLain.

Time and again someone would remark that Howard is a special person, who honestly cares about others. Even on her night, she was not focusing on herself. She had brought newspaper clippings for one friend, a gift she wanted to get to another and even gave away the decorations at the eve-

nings end. Her joy is seeing others happy. Perhaps that is what keeps her so vital and young at heart. (mju-cr)

To highlight East County events or people in this column, please call 442-4404, extension 370; or write to Cynthia Reed-Porter, Community News Editor, *The Daily Californian*, P.O. Drawer 1565, El Cajon, CA 92022.(car)