

Big party for centenarian

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Matt Hage/News-Miner

Harrie Hughes dances with friend Renee Ruiz at his 100th birthday party at Arctic Circle Hot Springs Resort Thursday. "I'm like an old automobile and they're going to put me in the dump pretty soon," said Hughes. Hughes moved to Alaska in 1924 and has spent the last half century in the Interior. "I don't feel any different than when I turned 50," said Hughes. Friends flew in from Fairbanks and residents from Central stopped in to wish Hughes a happy birthday. **Story and more photos on Page B-1.**

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Friday, April 30, 1999



Matt Hage/News-Miner

BIG DAY—Harrie Hughes talks to friends at his 100th birthday party at the Arctic Circle Hot Springs on Thursday.

Even at 100, Harrie's still telling stories

By SEAN COCKERHAM
Staff Writer

ARCTIC CIRCLE HOT SPRINGS—Alaska pioneer Harrie Hughes has lived a boisterous life filled with one-liners, good friends and plenty of hard work.

Yet Hughes had somehow expected his 100th birthday Thursday would pass without much hoopla.

"I ain't going to do much," Hughes had said the day before his centennial, adding with his mischievous grin, "when you get this age you have to take a leak every 30 minutes."

He did not know that the owners of the Arctic Circle Hot Springs Resort had planned a surprise birthday party worthy even of his impressive Sourdough status.

"I never knew I had so many

friends," Hughes said Thursday as the crowd of well-wishers sang "Happy Birthday."

Friends flew in from Fairbanks, 140 miles to the southeast, or drove from nearby Central. Dozens of people came to honor a man admired for his honesty, work ethic and humor—not to mention longevity.

"I just want to be like him," said Jim Crabb, owner of Crabb's Corner restaurant, bar and general store in Central. "Live that old and enjoy it the way he has."

Hughes spent much of his life in Fairbanks and now lives in one of the cabins at the Arctic Circle Hot Springs Resort, where he was a night watchman and storyteller in the early 1990s.

The cabins, initially occupied



Matt Hage/News-Miner

BEST WISHES—Harrie Hughes gets a call from Gov. Tony Knowles on his 100th birthday at the Arctic Circle Hot Springs lodge on Thursday. "I gave him an earful," said Hughes of his conversation with Knowles.

by the families of early miners, stretch out from a rambling lodge built in 1930 from materials barged up the Yukon River.

The scene added to the sense of Alaska history which permeated the birthday celebration, as Hughes reminisced about the century past in the balloon-festooned lodge.

He recalled driving his 1928 Chevy Roadster on a dog trail out to the same hot springs

hotel, over 60 years ago. "Where that (hot springs) swimming pool is today was a cabbage patch," he said.

Hughes still has a sharp mind and can tell ample stories of river-running and living off the land. "Grizzly Adams had nothing on me," he noted.

Hughes also recounted experiences as diverse as visiting Congress to push Alaska projects—like setting aside the tract of land which became Alas-

kaland—and capturing five men on a crime spree who broke into his Alaska Range cabin.

He recalled working as a volunteer firefighter in a Fairbanks made up of dirt streets and wooden sidewalks. He spoke with pride of building 27 back-country cabins throughout the Interior, not laying the hammer down until his 80s.

Hughes was born in Indiana in 1899 and worked in a California shipyard during World

War I, then as a contractor and lawman in the Seattle area before moving to Alaska in 1924.

"I got up in Alaska where it was God's country and not anybody else's," he said.

Hughes first worked in the canneries of southeast Alaska, then signed on with the Alaska Railroad. After several years moving around the state, Hughes settled down in Fairbanks. He owned Harrie Hughes

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Lawmakers talk big about state-owned gas line