

Seniors seek mystery woman's identity

Center's open house generates community awareness

By Kate A. Hallock
Resident Community News

While ghosts don't haunt the property at 1115 Edgewood Avenue South, a portrait of a mystery woman has visitors at the Florida Christian Center pondering her tale, which may have begun during the Roaring Twenties.

Nearly a century ago, what was formerly a military academy in Murray Hill became a home for the aged. Built in 1914, the Florida Military Academy was home to 75 boarding students and 50 day students until 1919, when the school closed.

The three-story red brick castellated building sat empty until it was purchased in 1922 by the National Benevolent Association, a social services arm of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). They converted the building into the Florida Christian Home for the Aged, serving 60 seniors who needed a place to live.

For the next 50 years, other buildings were erected on the site and then demolished, or re-purposed as adult day care for those with dementia, a nursing home, and more. At some point during this period, a portrait was painted of a distinguished-looking white-haired woman dressed in black.

Residents of what is now Florida Christian Apartments (built in 1972) and Sundale Manor



Do you know who this is? Portrait of a woman found in the old Florida Christian Home, 1922-1972.

Apartments (built in 1982) are wondering who the "Lady in Black" might be.

The portrait was on display at an open house event at the Florida Christian Center on June 30. Many of the approximately 300 residents, as well as guests from nearby Edgewood Condominiums, paused to take a long, hard look at the large oil painting.

Although no one seemed to know the woman's identity, the mystery didn't keep anyone from enjoying refreshments donated by Community Loaves, Maple Street Biscuit Company and Moon River Pizza. The open house was held to celebrate the redecoration of the center and to generate awareness of the need for community support.



Florida Christian Center board of directors: Cheryl Brooks, Rev. Kimberly Weir, Linda Hull, Jack Richardson, Lisa Legeer; back: Bert Wasmund, Glenn Weyand, Rev. Milton Mikesell, Bill O'Byrne

"Rev. Kimberly Weir has created a whole new energy for this seniors' ministry," said Saunie McLaughlin, member of Riverside Avenue Christian Church and a volunteer in the Activities Center. "A fresh new coat of paint, carpeting, and an overall more appealing look has also brought energy to the activities building for this HUD senior facility."

Weir, seven years a chaplain with Heartland Hospice, is finishing her first year at Florida Christian Center as chaplain and executive director. She manages the nonprofit on a \$250,000 budget for salaries, maintenance and programs. Most of the funding – 75 percent – comes from endowments, but those are decreasing. The rest of it comes from memorials and other donations.

"We were able to update our building with a new roof about three years ago and new carpet and paint over this last year. The funds came from a reserve that is dwindling," said Weir, of Avondale. "Without additional gifts, future updates and maintenance will become more difficult. This is one of the purposes of the Open House. We wanted to let our churches and our community

know that this ministry to senior and disabled adults is still vital and needs support."

The center was built in 1994 with seed money from the National Benevolent Association, but the ministry has been in existence for some time, strongly connected to the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).

The ministries and activities at Florida Christian Center serve the residents in the two apartment complexes and the condominium, which are independently run and have their own boards of directors.

If you recognize the Lady in Black, send an email to editor@residentnews.net with as many details as you know.



Shirley Muntean and Evelyn Ryan are volunteers in the Florida Christian Center gift shop.

DESIGNER: KARTON PERRELL (Los Angeles)

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