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Golden girls vie for crown

Katherine Roth

Northern News Services

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SOMBA K'E/YELLOWKNIFE - Homecoming pageants usually consist of fancy dresses and the fight for an elaborate crown, but the YK75 homecoming celebration commemorating Yellowknife's 75th anniversary is changing things up a bit this summer.

Eight contestants have signed up for the Golden Girls Queen pageant, all of them longtime Yellowknifers. This pageant is particularly unique because no woman younger than Yellowknife itself is allowed to participate.

Money raised during the pageant will go toward the homecoming celebration plus the eight different community groups supported by the women.

Tickets are available starting Saturday, May 9, and can be purchased through the pageant contestants as well as the organizations they are representing. The Northern Frontier Visitors Centre will also be selling tickets on behalf of the women. A winner will be announced during anniversary celebrations June 19 to July 4.

Precy Rivera



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Precy Rivera at her graduation
in 1952



Rivera at her home in May
2009

The youngest contestant in the pageant is 77-year-old Precy Rivera. Her daughter, Gloria Reyes, decided to nominate her as a way to help support the Yellowknife Philippine Cultural Association. Rivera moved to Yellowknife from the Philippines in 1983 after receiving sponsorship from Reyes.

Reyes said convincing somebody to join on behalf of the association was no easy feat, but she was finally able to sway her mother.

"Nobody wanted to join because they are all too shy," she said. "After I told (my mom) about the support it would give to the association, she was happy to join. She is a very happy-go-lucky woman who always jokes around."

Carolyn England



Carolyn England at her
wedding in 1942



England at a recent lunch

Yellowknife has been the place 88-year-old Carolyn England has called home for nearly 53 years. She agreed to participate in the contest when she was told she would only have to represent the YK Seniors' Society, and they would do the rest.

"I'm not much for going out and selling tickets," England said. "The Baker Centre does really great work, so I want to support them. They are really busy all the time, and what they do over there is a really good thing."

Jan Stirling



Jan Stirling during her time as a nursing sister



Stirling at her home on May 6

Jan Stirling, 81, came to Yellowknife in 1971 when her late husband, Bill, was transferred to the city with the military. Since then, she has become an iconic woman within the community, winning the Wise Woman award in 1999 and the Governor General's Caring Canadian award in 2000. Stirling worked as a nurse at the public health clinic for 25 years, which has since been renamed after her.

When the Canadian National Institute for the Blind (CNIB) nominated her for the pageant, she thought it would be fun to take part.

"There are a lot of old timers coming back to participate, and it's nice to reunite the old friends and old times," said Stirling.

Ruth Spence



A high school picture of Ruth Spence taken around 1945



Spence at her home in May, 2009

Former city councillor Ruth Spence, 82, is participating in the pageant as a way to support the YWCA, where she worked for 16 years. She said that YK75 is a great way to bring past residents back up to the city for an affordable price.

"I think one of the major highlights is the cheap airfare," Spence said. "It's really good to encourage people to come back."

Barb Bromley



Barb Bromley in 1949



Bromley at her home in May, 2009

Barb Bromley, 83, and her family still call Yellowknife home. A mother of four, Bromley said she's glad to still have all of her children living in the city. She looks forward to YK75 as a way to look back on the history of the

community with old friends.

"We have had our ups and downs with the gold mines closing and the diamond mines not doing too well," she said. "We are lucky to still have an economy up here."

Bromley will be running on behalf of the Yellowknife Community Foundation.

She said she didn't even know she was going to be in the pageant until she came back from a holiday.

Jean Piro



Jean Piro sometime during the 1940s



Piro earlier this year

The NWT Mining Heritage Society nominated 86-year-old Jean Piro, and told her about her involvement when she got home. Lucky for them, she agreed to help because she hopes the money raised will help open a mining museum at Giant Mine.

Her greatest concern come June is the lack of accommodations available for people coming to Yellowknife for the celebrations.

"Most people coming back are almost as old as me," she said. "In past years, it was fine to sleep on somebody's floor, but now we are more civilized than that. I hope they can find beds."

Ethel Wilson



Ethel Wilson in uniform in 1944



Wilson in her home this month

The oldest contestant is 93-year-old Ethel Wilson. A resident of Aven Manor and a past avid volunteer for the legion, Dorene Ouellette said she was a fantastic candidate. Her participation in the contest is in support of the Ladies' Auxiliary Royal Canadian Legion.

Esther Braden



Esther Braden in 1942



Braden in her home this year

Esther Braden, 85, became part of the pageant as a way to join the celebration while helping to raise money for the Yellowknife Association of Concerned Citizens for Seniors (YACCS).

Braden said reunions like YK75 are important in keeping the community together.

"We need to remember who we are and where we came from," said Braden. "Yellowknife is a young city, but a lot has happened in even the last 25 years."

