

CITY OF PHILADELPHIA

Office of the City Representative
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Melanie Johnson, *City Representative*

Mayor Michael Nutter honors the City's Centenarians in milestone 10th annual celebration

(PHILADELPHIA) May 21, 2010 -- Mayor Michael A. Nutter hosted an annual birthday luncheon to honor Philadelphia residents who are at least 100-years-old today at Sheet Metal Workers Union Hall in South Philadelphia.

To mark "Older Americans Month," which is celebrated every year nationally in May, the Mayor recognized the contributions of more than 400 centenarians in Philadelphia -- home of one of the nation's largest centenarian populations. Some 154 seniors will turn 100 years old in Philadelphia in 2010. Nearly 100 Centenarians attended this grand birthday party, along with family and friends.

The 10th Annual Mayor's Centenarians' Celebration is a tribute to life and longevity, and was designed to recognize the accomplishments of Philadelphia's Centenarians and soon-to-be centenarians. Residents were required to be 100 years old during 2010 to participate.

Mayor Nutter presented remarks, a ceremonial tribute officially declaring May 21, 2010 as "10th Anniversary Centenarians Celebration Day in Philadelphia." He also cut a huge ceremonial birthday cake with the event's oldest male centenarian in attendance, **Lazar Ayzman**, of Northeast Philadelphia, and the oldest female centenarians **Anna Henderson** and **Willie Lassiter**, both of West Philadelphia. Ayzman, 105, is a decorated veteran of two wars, and Henderson, 110, is a grandmother of 25, a devoted house wife and respected cook.

The second oldest woman at the event is 109-year-old Willie Lassiter, who will be 110 in September. Willie is the granddaughter of slaves and has lived through the Great Depression when she stood in line to get rations of meat. **Mattie Atkins**, 103, and **Mitchell Atkins**, 97, of West Philadelphia, were the longest-married couple attending the centenarian event this year. They have been married for 80 years, as of January 24, 2010.

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ADD 1/ MAYOR'S CENTENARIAN CELEBRATION

Mayor Nutter posed for photographs with many of the centenarians. The centenarians received tokens of appreciation and acknowledgements from the City to commemorate the occasion.

“There are very few centenarian celebrations of this magnitude, in which a city recognizes the achievements and longevity of its residents, and so we feel privileged to have the opportunity to honor this distinguished group,” said Mayor Nutter. “As a living link from the past to the present, many of these special residents have worked and raised families in Philadelphia, while witnessing the city’s progress over the years.

Minister Malcolm Byrd of the Mayor’s Office of Faith-Based Initiatives gave the blessing at the centenarian celebration. Ella Ghant and The E. G. Trio provided the entertainment, performing for the centenarians, family, and friends. The entertainment was followed by a special video presentation, “Living a Legacy,” the theme of the luncheon, which centenarians participated in an inside look into the remarkable lives of several special centenarians.

Through the cooperation of the Regional Office of the Social Security Administration, invitations from the Mayor were sent to Philadelphia’s centenarians.

Joining Mayor Nutter and participating in the celebration as speakers were: City Representative Melanie Johnson, the luncheon’s emcee; Debrah Merlin, Assistant Deputy Mayor/Mayor’s Commission on Aging; Laurie Watkins, Regional Commissioner, Social Security Administration, and Rick Spector, Community Relations Director of the Philadelphia Corporation.

Said City Representative Melanie Johnson: “Today’s 10th anniversary luncheon truly is a celebration for the ages. It gives us a very special opportunity to express our great admiration and respect for some of our most cherished citizens. They are a very distinctive group of individuals who can share their great insight, talent and experience.”

The largest centenarian populations represented at the luncheon were from West Philadelphia, Northeast Philadelphia and the Germantown/Mt. Airy sections of the city. Established in 2001 as part of the City of Philadelphia’s efforts to mark the anniversary of the completion of the century-old City Hall, the Mayor’s

EDITORS: *Photos of the Mayor’s Centenarian Celebration can be viewed on:*
www.flickr.com/photos/phillycityrep

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