

Birthday wish comes true

By **JOAN KEENEY**

HERALD CORRESPONDENT

When you think about making a wish, you usually think about shooting stars, rubbing a magic lamp or blowing the candles out on your birthday cake. Most of the time, our wish is just that — a wish. It's usually nothing more because very rarely does your wish ever come true.

However, that's not the case for one special lady by the name of Mary Frances Decker.

When she blew out her birthday candles on her 97th birthday on March 19, she asked for something she has always wanted to do — ride on a motorcycle. The birthday wish fairies must have been listening really closely because her wish came true on March 27.

Decker said her wish to ride on a motorcycle has been a lifelong dream. Thanks to Brookdale Senior Living and Jeremy Bloom's Wish of a Lifetime, a program that helps grant the wishes of seniors, Decker had the ride of her life.

Decker is a resident of the Sterling House Punta Gorda, which is a Brookdale Senior Living assisted living community in Florida. All Brookdale residents are invited to share and submit their wishes by filling out a survey form explaining an experience they would like to have fulfilled. The wishes are then turned over to the Wish of a Lifetime program, which was established in 2008 by Bloom, a two-time Olympic skier and former NFL football player. Bloom started this foundation in honor of his grandmother, Donna

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Wheeler.

A call was made to Frankie Kennedy, president of the Southwest Chapter of ABATE (American Bikers Aimed

Towards Education) and representative of the House of Trikes and Bikes in Fort Myers. Kennedy was thrilled to be able to help fulfill Decker's wish, and they set up a date and time for the big ride.

Decker is a beautiful woman, and she is always dressed in long flowing dresses. For her big ride, however, she was going to have to wear pants, which was a switch in her routine, but she didn't mind at all.

Nervous and excited, she couldn't even eat her lunch the day of the ride.

The sounds of motorcycles could be heard rolling into the parking lot of Sterling House around 1 p.m., and a big, blue, shiny three-wheeled motorcycle pulled right up to the door. Decker's face lit up with excitement, and she had a huge smile on her face like a child on Christmas morning.

There were several members from the ABATE club who attended the event, so Decker could really feel what it was like to ride with the club around town.

With her helmet strapped on, the motorcycles started up and away they went — not around the parking lot like they had first planned, but all around downtown Punta Gorda. With the wind blowing in her face and the feeling of being "free," Decker said she had a blast.

After her ride, she was asked how she liked it.

"I'll never enjoy a car again," was her response.

As Kennedy presented her with the helmet she was wearing, he asked her if they could come back when she turned 100 years old and do it again.

"My mother lived to be 102 years old," Decker replied. "So it's a date."

Besides the helmet, Decker was given two club T-shirts to wear as a remembrance of the day her lifelong wish came true.

To find out more about Brookdale Senior Living Inc., visit to www.brookdaleliving.com.

To find out more about Jeremy Bloom's Wish of a Lifetime, visit www.seniorwish.org.



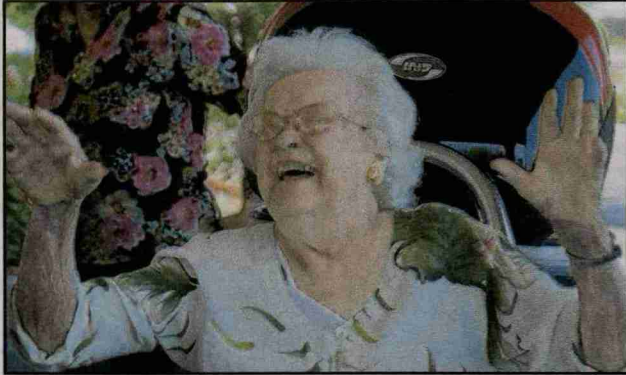


Frankie Kennedy, the president of the South-west Chapter of ABATE, helps Mary Frances Decker off the motorcycle. As you can see, she really enjoyed herself.



HERALD PHOTOS BY JOAN KEENEY

Mary Frances Decker gives a wave to everybody as she comes back from her motorcycle ride around Punta Gorda. Keith Baker was her driver for the big ride.



Smiling from ear to ear, Mary Frances Decker was thrilled to be sitting on a motorcycle.



When told she could keep the helmet she had worn for the ride, Mary Frances Decker was thrilled. She will need to keep that helmet for her 100th birthday.



Members of the Southwest Chapter of ABATE and Mary Frances Decker's family gather for a photo. From left to right in the front row are Rob Cran, Frankie Kennedy, Decker, Keith and Dylan Baker, Jane Dickinson, Wayne Cevra and Beverly Anne Doupe. In the back row from left to right are Pat Jablonski and Jeff Hoover.