

By Traci Chapman

It was a celebration 40 years in the making, as Spanish Cove and Yukon together celebrated the retirement community's birthday.

Hundreds of people attended the Sept. 21 event, which featured time capsules and speakers, tours and refreshments. It was a commemoration of a dream that began in 1974, when a group of educators decided to take their retirement in their own hands. That decision would have lasting, positive implications for Yukon, Mayor Ken Smith said. "Spanish Cove has been such an important, integral part of Yukon," Smith said. "We are honored to have not only the facility and its staff, but also its residents, who have brought vitality, strength and history to our community."



Spanish Cove has come a long way from its roots, Director Don Bloese said. Now home to more than 300 residents from across the country and employing about 175 people in a variety of occupations, the 17-acre community Cove has expanded to include 182 apartments and 20 cottages.

Spanish Cove's residents are well-known far beyond the community's walls. Whether rowing the Spanish Cove dragon boat, traveling on its 40-person coach to destinations near and far or volunteering or working in the community, Spanish Cove residents have shown that age does not mean slowing down, Bloese said.

"We want to be a good part of this community and we want to give back where we can," he said. "Yukon is the best place we could be – we have such strong support in the community."

While many residents are from Oklahoma, many also come from far and wide to spend their retirement years at the Cove, they said.

It's a group of people who have come to enjoy and celebrate that time not just wind down, Pat Snyder said.

"It's amazing to me how energetic and alive this community is, how happy almost everyone is," she said. "To say we're like a family really is a true statement."

Sunday's celebration marked anniversaries for several long-time residents and employees, as well, Bloese said. Perhaps best loved and known is Debbie Miller, the veteran director of wellness and resident relations who joined Spanish Cove 23 years ago. Universally loved by residents and appreciated for what they call her mission to keep

them healthy and active, Miller said she gained more from the residents than she ever received.



"They have taught all of us so much," Miller said. "Our residents are so many things to us – a look into the past, and a way for us to look at the future, as well.

"They are fun, appreciative, inspirational – they are truly the kind of person I always want to be," she said.

Eric Peters was another employee honored during the special event, which marked his 21-year career with Spanish Cove. The director of culinary and housekeeping services is one of the reasons life at Spanish Cove is special, resident Dick Mitchell said.

"He and his staff, well, all of them, are always looking for ways to make our lives better," he said. "They care about who we are, what makes us happy, how to make us feel special, and that's a rare gift."