

# Mary White, 98, just keeps on rolling

By Bob Cosgrove

On March 20, the evening of her most recent birthday, Mary White's 14-pound Brunswick Rhino bowling ball backed into the 1-2 pocket and once again mixed the pins in a manner that would have pleased Mike Aulby. As White calmly walked off the approach, with balloons rising, cameras flashing, spotlights glaring, and a Channel 4 cameraman filming every minute (for a segment that would appear on that evening's 11 p.m. newscast), fellow league members and spectators alike at AMF/Fair Lanes Marlow Heights shook their heads in amazement and almost to a person said aloud, "She's something else!"

Indeed, at 98, Mary White is not your normal senior bowler. Competing with those many years younger—some of whom *act* like they're 98—White appears many years younger and has a teen-ager's enthusiasm and attitude about life.

"I never get tired, I'm just glad I'm still bowling," said White. "When I'm bowling bad, I'm bowling bad—that's all. Unlike many older bowlers, I don't let age get me down." And she meant it.

White, a District resident who currently averages 112 in the Fun Incorporated Mixed league Wednesday evenings at Marlow Heights, laughed as she recalled a younger man who danced with her at a birthday celebration a few years ago.

"We were doing the twist," White said, "and we both twisted all the way to the ground. When I came up, however, he was still on the floor. He was only 78, but he couldn't get back up! I had to help him."

White's second husband died in 1988 after 35 years of marriage. She discarded her first husband after five years.

"There's no need to hang around if you don't do right," she said.

For 37 years, White performed many tasks at the Government Printing Office before

retiring in 1955. She stayed active, mostly by playing cards. However, she started bowling in 1966 at Bowl America Glassmanor in Oxon Hill after moving to a nearby apartment complex that was forming a league.

"I used to bowl scores of 180 and 190 all the time—even a 213 and a 202," she said proudly. "I guess I don't do that now because I'm old."

White's mocking tone indicated that age was not really a factor in her declining scores. Instead, it's her bowling ball.

"That darn ball," she said. "I paid \$115 for that devilish bowling ball and it's not [scoring].



Mary White was born on March 20, 1898.



Pat Hulme (right), manager of Marlow Heights, helped arrange the surprise celebration for her friend.

It just goes down the lane and curves. I like rolling a straight ball.

"With other balls, I used to shoot at the 7-pin by rolling straight down the edge of the lane to make the spare. Now, people tell me to roll my ball cross-lane, but when the ball gets down there, it just curves away. This little rascal makes me so mad, I don't know what to do. I think it's costing me a whole lot of pins."

After Glassmanor closed in 1986, she began bowling at Marlow Heights. There, no matter how she performs, White is treated with reverence by everyone—the latest birthday bash was yet another example.

"People tell me I'm an inspiration to them," White said, "but I don't know. Maybe they're just trying to make the old lady feel good."

White still enjoys playing cards several times weekly. Each Wednesday, in fact, she plays pinochle with her friends until 3 p.m., when she goes home to prepare for her evening bowling session, which White would like you to know is *not* a senior citizens' league.

"Those folks are just too old!" White said.

White loves her bowling, but she decries the disintegrating camaraderie among league members.

"Before, we bowled for trophies," she explained. "Now, it's for prize money, and the bowlers are right at your throat. The attitude is altogether different now."

While leaving the bowling center, she scoffed at a reporter who asked if she still drives.

"Of course. Why wouldn't I?" said White, feigning disdain. After placing her ball in the trunk, she gently patted the side of her 1969 Chevy—something with which she can easily identify.

"It may be old, but she still runs great."

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