

Centenarian

St. Johnian seamstress celebrates 100 years

JUDI SHIMEL

ST. JOHN — Seated by the door in a modest seaside home, the territory's newest centenarian spent much of Tuesday greeting a steady stream of well wishers.

One-hundred-year-old Mary Wiltshire managed a smile three hours into a celebration of the day she entered the world in the Danish West Indies on Nov. 20, 1913.

She sat in a wheelchair Wednesday, accepting gifts, hugs and kisses while her sister and her niece arranged a woven white hat on her head.

She did not speak during the visit but relatives said the honoree was born Mary Roberts to a family that included six sisters and one brother in Reef Bay, St. John, an area which is now part of the Virgin Islands National Park.

No one lives in the Reef Bay area anymore, but

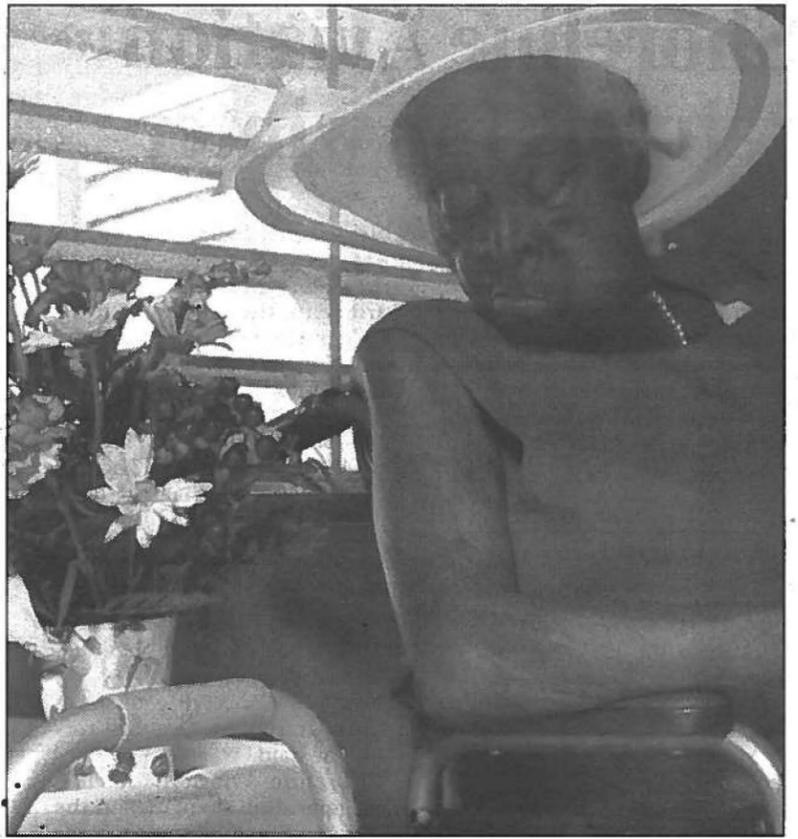
thousands of tourists make the long, downhill trek from Centerline Road to the bay each year along the popular Reef Bay Trail.

"In those days a midwife came to the house. She was born at home," her niece said.

Wiltshire made a living sewing clothes for others and caring for seniors in their homes. She had 13 children, nine of which lived long enough to see their mother celebrate her 100th birthday.

The home where she lives is found along a coastal road on the island's south shore, not too far from her birthplace. Her children, cousins, friends and neighbors enjoyed music Wednesday while sitting on low stone seawalls in the expansive front yard.

Family members say the centenarian remains alert to her surroundings and while she has a hard time recognizing some familiar faces, she lights up at the sight of a favorite grandson.



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Retired St. John seamstress and mother of 13, Mary Wiltshire, admires a bouquet given to her at her 100th birthday party on Wednesday.

Governor's Office responds to GERS administrator's claims

WYNDIAMBROSE

ST. CROIX — Gov. John de Jongh Jr. and officials with the Government Employees' Retirement System remain at odds over missing contributions and unpaid pensions.

During a St. Croix Retirees Inc. meeting Wednesday, the organization's Secretary Abdul Ali reported that some government retirees haven't received pensions for almost a year.

Under VI law, all employee and employer contributions must be paid to the Employees' Retirement System of the Government of the Virgin Islands before retirees can receive their pensions.

GERS Administrator Austin Nibbs told meeting attendees Tuesday that the government owes GERS \$47 million in missing contributions. He also told attendees that the governor never signed a settlement agreement, an agreement that Nibbs said he and de Jongh had shaken hands on at an earlier date.

"The governor don't want to pay nothing," he said. "He doesn't wanna pay loss investment. He doesn't wanna pay...the delinquency. He doesn't want to pay anything."

But according to Nathan Simmonds, Government House Deputy Chief of Staff and Principal Advisor to the Governor, the allegations are "totally untrue."

"The ball is in the GERS court," Office of the Governor spokesperson Jean Greaux told The Avis via email late Wednesday afternoon.

Both Greaux and Simmonds said that in August de Jongh had signed and submitted to GERS an agreement that met all the terms

that the GERS and the government had agreed on after months of negotiation; however, the GERS board chairman told the governor that the board had rejected the agreement.

The proposed agreement, as detailed in a letter signed by de Jongh and addressed to GERS Board of Trustees Chairman Vincent Liger, would cover missing employer contributions for employees who retired between October 2010 and December 2013. According to Simmonds, the agreement also provided for the reimbursement of some retirees who had to pay the employer portions of missing contributions. The money for the missing employer contributions would come from a portion of 2005 and prior property tax collections.

Greaux said de Jongh met with the GERS board of trustees in September explaining why he couldn't sign a board-revised agreement requiring the government to pay penalties and interest on missing contributions or lost investment income. Simmonds confirmed this in a later interview.

It is the government's position, according to Greaux, that it is unreasonable to require payment of penalties and interest on the unpaid amounts or lost investment income to GERS because the system "had never informed the government that there were outstanding contributions, or the amount of such missing contributions."

Nibbs said he couldn't attest to anything that happened before his six years with the system. He did, however, confirm that the government did not know about the missing contributions until recent-

ly because the entity hadn't been billed previously. A new GERS system, he said, was what recently revealed the shortages.

"They [the government] did not know," he said. "That's why I waived the penalty and delinquency charge."

He said that by law he had the right to waive those charges but the law didn't give him the right to waive charges on loss investments. While the final draft of the proposed settlement that was sent to the governor does not include penalty and delinquency charges, Nibbs said that the draft does include loss investment charges.

Simmonds argued, however, that whether or not the government was billed any type of charges in addition to the missing contribution debt, there wasn't an existing, guaranteed revenue source to cover the entire sum.

"We believe there's enough monies to pay all the missing contributions," Simmonds said, "but if you start adding all of this [interest], we're not sure if that's going to be sufficient to care for all that."

Simmonds also disputed the figure that GERS representatives have said the government owes.

"The issue about \$47 million is totally ridiculous," he said.

He also said that GERS has failed to present an accurate analysis, showing the calculation of missing contributions for each employee that adds up to the \$47 million figure.

"The governor said provide the documentation to show us and we'll acknowledge it," Simmonds said.

Nibbs defended the system's claims, saying that a GERS actuary estimated the figure and that

the actuary was "well qualified to do what he did." The figure was plausible, according to Nibbs, based on a 2012 sample of retirees.

He said that based on actual data, looking through each NOPA, it was discovered that there was over \$3 million in missing employer contributions for about 200 employees who retired in 2012. There are over 6,000 current, Tier 1 employees left to retire and who are likely to have missing employer contributions, according to Nibbs.

The math, to Nibbs, seems simple. If a sample of 200 retirees in 2012 were missing \$3 million in employer contributions, it was likely that over 6,000 more retirees could bring the total government debt to \$47 million, he said.

According to Nibbs, GERS has decided to meet with the governor on the proposed settlement agreement one more time. The governor is willing to sign an agreement, according to Simmonds, but de Jongh's position on lost investment charges remains the same.

Simmonds said, ultimately, the government is the planned benefactor for the \$1.8 billion unfunded liability that now threatens the economic future of present and future retirees. He said the government would be making arrangements with the Senate on legislation that could address the unfunded liability but that change wouldn't happen all at once.

"In any event, the government is the plan sponsor and any remaining outstanding amounts would be satisfied when the government addresses the unfunded liability," Simmonds said.

Man charged with raping 16-year-old

ST. CROIX — Police on St. Croix arrested 33-year-old Eugene Omani Stevenson on Wednesday for allegedly raping a female minor.

Stevenson was charged with the first-degree rape, second-degree aggravated rape and unlawful sexual contact with a female minor, according to Melody Rames, police spokeswoman.

Stevenson was arrested at about 1 p.m. on Wednesday and held at Golden Grove Adult Correctional Facility after failing to post bail, set at \$75,000.

Detectives said Stevenson forced the 16-year-old victim to have sexual intercourse with him on several occasions.

Rames said police are withholding additional information on the case in order to protect the victim.

Police urge anyone who has any information regarding this incident to call detectives at 712-6077, 712-6037 or Crime Stoppers USVI at 1-800-222-TIPS.