

Businesswoman celebrates centennial



May Gruber chats with a guest in front of a quilt made for her 100th birthday party at St. Anselm College on Sunday.

KATHY REMILLARD

The former owner of one of Manchester's popular clothing manufacturers, Pandora Sweaters and Sportswear, has received birthday wishes from the governor and the League of Women Voters of New Hampshire, which she co-founded.

The week of Gruber's birthday seems fitting, then, for her to be presented with the town's Boston Post Cane, which selectmen did on Sunday at a celebration attended by family and friends.

The centenarian is nearly the same age as the Boston Post Cane tradition, which began in 1909.

That was the year the publisher of The Boston Post, at one time one of the country's largest newspapers, is said to have forwarded to selectmen in 700 New England towns a gold-tipped ebony cane to present to its oldest male citizen. By 1930, after some controversy, women were also made eligible to receive the cane.

But in 1930, the girl then known as May Blum was still a student at New York University, where she graduated the following year at age 19.

She married Sol Sidore, and eventually founded the knitting business Pandora Industries with Sol and her parents. While Pandora went on to become a multimillion dollar company, which moved to Manchester in 1940, it wasn't an easy journey.

According to "Pandora's Pride," one of two books written by Gruber, the only way she would be able to become president of the company after Sol's sudden death in 1963 was if she bought out the shares of the company owned by her father and brother. She raised the money in less than 90 days and, in 1964, became the third president of Pandora.

"I ran a big business," Gruber said during an interview at her home. "It was hard, but we had wonderful people there."

While it wasn't the norm for a woman to be at the helm of a company at that time, Gruber said she hadn't considered herself a pioneer back then.

May Gruber takes a walk every day, returns phone calls and emails, and puts in some time in at the office once a week. This wouldn't be considered much for a 30-year-old, but May Gruber turns 100 today. The former owner of one of Manchester's popular clothing manufacturers, Pandora Sweaters and Sportswear, has received birthday wishes from the governor and the League of Women Voters of New Hampshire, which she co-founded.

By KATHY REMILLARD

Union Leader Correspondent

GOFFSTOWN -- MAY GRUBER takes a walk every day, returns phone calls and emails, and puts in some time in at the office once a week.

This wouldn't be considered much for a 30-year-old, but May Gruber turns 100 today.

“I don't think there was time for that kind of thing,” she said.

Gruber managed the company for 19 years before selling it in 1983.

During her second marriage to Sam Gruber, she expanded her support of local arts and music, establishing an adult summer music camp at St. Anselm College. Gruber also founded the Manchester Community Music School and donated many pieces to the Manchester's Currier Museum.

In addition to her roles as wife, mother of five and businesswoman, Gruber was publisher of the Manchester Free Press. She received an honorary doctorate from Notre Dame College, and was a recipient of the Susan B. Anthony Award in 2005.

Gruber said Sunday's birthday party, attended by nearly 200 family members and friends, was “a beautiful day.”

Today, Gruber said, she plans to go out for lunch with her son Ralph and daughter-in-law Frankie.

She credits good nutrition and exercise with her longevity.

“I try to get in a walk of some kind every day,” she said.

Those interested in delving deeper into Gruber's career can head to Concord this Thursday, when the Red River Theatre will show “Sweater Queen: May Gruber and the Rise of Pandora Industries.”

Living for an entire century hasn't jaded Gruber's outlook on life.

“I think every day you see things that surprise you,” she said.