



Happy Birthday, Maria

By Cathy Tyson



L to R: Maria Canales, Ana Jardine, Jose Flora Santo & Minnie Snider

Photo Tod Fierner

Chalk it up to hard work, not drinking or smoking, and practicing yoga until well into her 80's, whatever the reason, Maria Dolores Canales, a resident of the Lafayette Care Facility just turned 103.

In 1905, the year she was born in El Salvador, the world was quite a different place. Theodore Roosevelt was President, Norway achieved independence from Sweden, Novocain was invented, the Wright brothers successfully flew an aircraft, and that little outpost in the desert, Las Vegas was founded.

Although coffee plantations were the primary business of the country in 1905, Maria owned a small clothing shop which had eight employees that designed and created apparel for the rich and famous. She still worked on a much more limited basis until her early nineties. "When I couldn't distinguish between dark blue and black

thread, I knew it was time to retire," she said.

She married twice and had three children, outliving two of them. Her family includes seven grandchildren, and fifteen great-grandchildren, most of who live in California, New Mexico and New York. She came to the U.S. from El Salvador in 1963 with her daughter Ana Ruth, who is married to an American and eventually became a citizen. At 100, she moved into the Lafayette Care Facility. While living with Ana Ruth, her husband and three children, she was affectionately called "Abuelita," and was famous for her special Salvadorian Christmas tamales.

The Lafayette Care Facility is one of a number of venues that is served by "Love is the Answer" (LITA) volunteers whose mission is to improve the quality

of life of residents in long-term care facilities who don't have many visitors by giving them emotional support. LITA is a non-profit, non sectarian agency that operates in Marin and Contra Costa Counties. The organization is always looking for volunteers to provide one-on-one conversation and companionship, for more information, go to www.lita-marin.org.