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Central Jersey's Original "Girl Friday" Celebrates 108

EDISON – She's not the last of a breed of go-getter female professionals, but she was undoubtedly one of the first.

Anne Johnson, an original "Girl Friday," will mark her 108th birthday April 21 at Roosevelt Care Center in Edison.

The daughter of Italian immigrants, Johnson was the youngest of six children born to the Brigante family of Plainfield.

"I've lived what I'd call a normal life," she said.

In her formative years, Johnson made the bold move to leave Plainfield High School and attend business college instead.

By 18 years old, she had graduated and was already navigating the daily grind as an office secretary.

That era's working female secretaries, who decades later would be coined "Girl Fridays," were coveted for their reliable nature and ability to handle a wide range of office duties.

Still, in the early 1920s, Johnson and her fellow female office managers were considered a nuance as the fairer sex sought to break the mold.

"I was alone and I ran everything," she recalled of those early days.

At 40, Johnson met and married her husband, Alfred Johnson.

While she never had children, by exchanging vows, she did inherit stepchildren and a family all her own.

In time, Johnson both moved to and began working out of Bound Brook.

Decades later, she left her long-time employer, a chemical company, opting for retirement.

She settled into Roosevelt just a few years back and has since delighted staff with her wit and stories.

As for the secret to longevity, Johnson doesn't have much of an explanation, other than to say: "I kept pretty busy."

For more information on Roosevelt Care Center at Edison, a long-term care facility operated by the Middlesex County Improvement Authority, interested parties may call 732-321-6800 or log onto www.rooseveltcarecenter.com.

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