

Reno woman celebrates 105th birthday at Bonanza casino

Written by Administrator

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Toshiko Kato was the oldest person in the Bonanza Casino, and possibly all of Reno, on Friday night.

She doesn't drink or gamble, but the centenarian is such a regular at the locals' casino on North Virginia Street that they made her a name tag. It reads, "The boss." But to customers and employees, she's just Grandma. Everyone knows her. Everyone loves her.

"I prefer Grandma," she says.

Ten years ago, Kato's daughter, Margaret Yoshimura, and son-in-law brought the 95-year-old to the Bonanza to gamble. They thought the great-grandmother would have fun.

"The spinning and lights were too much," Kato said of the slot machines and busy casino floor.

Kato walked to the coffee shop. It wasn't long before she was chatting with employees and greeting customers. After a few visits, the staff asked her, "Want to help roll silverware?"

Her regular visits, sometimes as many as four times a week, slowed down during COVID-19, but she was back on Friday night to celebrate her 105th birthday at the casino's steakhouse. Her meals are always on the house.

She hasn't been in as much as she'd like, she said.

"I hurt my knee," she said, pointing down. "I have the same kind of knee injury baseball players get."

She met her husband in a Japanese internment camp

Kato was born in 1918 in California. In her 20s, she and her family were put in an internment camp after President Franklin Roosevelt ordered people of Japanese descent to be incarcerated during World War II.

At the camp in Arizona, she met her husband and taught fourth grade. After their release, she and her husband had two children.

When her daughters were older, Kato worked at Macy's. She retired in the 1980s and traveled. One of her greatest memories was seeing Queen Elizabeth II during a trip to Holland.

Her second home is the Bonanza Casino

These days, Kato stays closer to her Reno home and the Bonanza.

"She is family and always will be," said Bonanza owner Ryan Sheltra, who decorated the steakhouse with balloons and streamers for her birthday.

Reno City Councilman Devon Reese said Kato is likely the oldest person in Reno. The Washoe County Health District does not track it, but Reese was confident there is no one older.

Reese called Kato a national treasure before presenting her with a City of Reno proclamation declaring her birthday Toshiko Kato Day.

"There are no secrets," she said when asked about the key to a long life. "Maybe just luck."

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