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MIAMI-DADE COUNTY



CHUCK FADELY/HERALD STAFF

CHEERS, MY DEAR: Jose Losada, 84, salutes his wife, Isabel, 88, during a ceremony for the reaffirmation of love held for 15 couples Monday at the Palace Nursing and Rehabilitation Center in Kendall, southwest Miami-Dade.

LOVE EVERLASTING

ON VALENTINE'S DAY, 15 ELDERLY COUPLES GATHER TO REAFFIRM AND CELEBRATE MARITAL ROMANCES THAT HAVE FLOURISHED FOR A COMBINED 900 YEARS

BY ALEXANDRA ZAYAS
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Joel and Marilyn Davis met at camp as teenagers.

"I saw this cute kid walking by in a peppermint striped skirt, and I stared at her," Joel said, sneaking glances at his wife. "She said, 'Who do you think you're staring at?'"

They married in 1949.

On Monday, they were

brated a combined 900 years of marriage by gathering on the patio of the Palace Nursing and Rehabilitation Center to renew their wedding vows in a "Reaffirmation of Commitment Ceremony."

Joel Davis, 77, wheeled Marilyn, 76, who is bedridden, under a decorated arch at the Kendall nursing center, where they celebrated their 61st Valentine's Day

"Love is more than verses on Valentine's Day and romance in movies," said the Rev. Victor Reyes, the chaplain at Vitas Hospice in Kendall and the "officiant" at Monday's ceremony. "We know that love is here and now, real and true, the most important thing in our lives."

As the chaplain spoke, Ben Englander, 83, stroked the cheek of his wife, Fay, 74.

they married a comparatively scant 27 years ago — the second marriage for each.

Fay and her girlfriend had crashed Ben's New Year's Eve party, and Fay's friend passed out, leaving Fay stranded at the party.

The following day, after Ben's son Robert had driven Fay home, she called Ben to thank him for a lovely eve-

Couples celebrate their endless love

• COUPLES, FROM 1B

ning, and to check up on her friend.

"My boss said to me, 'Be careful with that woman. You're going to wind up being married to her.' I said, 'That clown? You've got to be nuts.' I said, 'I wouldn't even marry her on a bet,'" Englander said.

Marry they did, in 1977, and on Monday their wedding photo sat next to 14 black-and-white portraits of the other couples.

Workers at the nursing center got the idea for the ceremony shortly after last year's Valentine's Day, when residents' spouses were asked to bring in their wedding photos. The photos were on display for three days.

"It became a sensitivity class for the staff," said Eliana



LIVING AND LEARNING

Some lessons learned from a millennium of marriage:

- "Sure you're going to have arguments. . . . But once you argue, never go to bed angry. Always make up before you go to bed." — Ben Englander, 83, married 27 years to Fay, 74
- "Perseverance" — Glen Cox, 85, married 34 years to Jane, 83
- "Love her very much. And respect her. And give her many kisses." — Jose Losada, 84, married 58 years to Isabel, 88
- "Communication. That's how we've stayed together all this time." — Joel Davis, 77, married 55 years to Marilyn, 76

Cardenas, the center's assistant administrator and director of social services. "Some of these residents, we see them as these elderly people, who sometimes have behavioral problems. But with the

pictures and the stories, we've seen them as entirely different people."

Most of the couples at Monday's ceremony consisted of one Palace resident and a spouse who visited

daily, Cardenas said. "They're just in love," she said. "This is what love is all about."

After the ceremony, Nat King Cole's *Unforgettable* played while the second-honorees enjoyed their second wedding cake.

Jose Losada, 84, carefully gave a sip of champagne to his 88-year-old wife Isabel, to whom he still refers as his *chica*.

Jose said he fell in love with Isabel at first sight on a visit to Cuba from Spain.

Fifty-eight years later, he can't stop kissing her.

"Ten kisses every ten minutes," he said, giving Isabel a kiss. "See?"

"What'd he say?" she asked in Spanish.

"I kissed her on the neck," Jose bragged.

"Ah, sí," she giggled. "Magnifico!"