



Advocating for Older Adults of Today and Tomorrow

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For Immediate Release

**Connecticut's Earth's Elders Foundation and Commission on Aging
Present 'Super Centenarian' Exhibit in Washington March 31-April 4**

WASHINGTON, D.C.—Two Connecticut-based organizations will present a unique exhibit featuring 29 larger-than-life portrait photographs of the world's oldest people—"super centenarians" at least 110 years old—in the rotunda of the historic Russell Senate Office Building March 31-April 4.

The exhibit, which has also been shown at the United Nations and in Tokyo, is presented by the Earth's Elders Foundation of Kent, Conn., in collaboration with the Connecticut Commission on Aging, an independent agency of the Connecticut General Assembly. It was presented for the entire month of June last year at the state Capitol in Hartford.

The commission and foundation are collaborating on an initiative to bring Connecticut students face-to-face with older adults through a curriculum program that fosters intergenerational activities and promotes greater respect and understanding.

The striking photographs, part of a 62-portrait collection, were taken between 2000 and 2004 at locations worldwide by Jerry Friedman, founder and director of the foundation and author of the book "Earth's Elders: The Wisdom of the World's Oldest People."

Friedman, a retired award-winning New York advertising photographer, began his super centenarian quest after spending four days in his 90-year-old mother's Boston care facility "...to try to imagine my own elder years." No one in history has met and interviewed so many of the oldest people on earth.

Commenting on the Washington photo exhibit and Earth's Elders education initiative, Connecticut Gov. M. Jodi Rell said, "We are very proud of these innovative Connecticut-based organizations for their groundbreaking work to improve the lives of America's older adults through an educational initiative that truly unites the generations. Thanks to the efforts of our state's Commission on Aging and Earth's Elders Foundation, this program has the potential to deeply touch the lives of thousands of people, young and old, nationwide."

The super centenarians include Damchaagiin Gendendarjaa, who when photographed was the leader of Tibetan Buddhism in Mongolia and earned his Ph.D. at 106 years old, and Bettie Wilson, a daughter of Mississippi slaves.

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Also featured is Emiliano Mercado Del Toro, a Puerto Rican pineapple and sugar cane laborer who, at age 7, witnessed the landing of Teddy Roosevelt and his Rough Riders. When Mercado Del Toro died in January 2007 at 115, he was the world's oldest person.

The book also features Fred Hale, a Maine railroad postal worker who, at 107, hopped off his porch roof after clearing it of snow. Emergency personnel arrived and announced that a passerby reported someone had plunged off the roof. Mr. Hale replied: "I didn't fall, I jumped!"

Friedman says, "From the first super centenarian I photographed to the last one I've just met, I have been remade, both figuratively and practically, each time."

School Curriculum Program

The curriculum and teacher's guide are offered free of charge to schools nationwide via the Earth's Elders website, www.earthselders.org. It was developed by Friedman and the Bank Street College of Education in New York and provides innovative ways for students to learn about history, geography, health and ethics by exploring original family documents and interviewing family and community elders to create oral histories.

"We are thrilled to bring the super centenarians exhibit to Washington to give thousands of people an opportunity to look into the eyes of the world's oldest people and to experience the wisdom, hope, humor and understanding they convey," Friedman says. "Our hope is that the exhibit will draw national attention to the educational component of this initiative, the school curriculum, which seeks to turn a generation gap into a living generation bridge."

"It is an honor for the Connecticut Commission on Aging to join with the Earth's Elders Foundation to bring this inspirational and educational exhibit to Washington," said commission Executive Director Julia Evans Starr. "In presenting the exhibit we hope to remind people that our elders, like our history, are national treasures."

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