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Local

S.F.'s oldest man is still sharp-tongued



(Cindy Chew/The Examiner)

Frank Mendez Sr., a native of Hawaii, celebrates his 105th birthday aloha-style at Laguna Honda Hospital on Monday.

swearing."

As for the secret to a long and healthy life, Mendez said you should do what feels good, but not too much of it.

He was a photographer for the San Francisco Call-Bulletin, a cowboy and horse wrangler. He once escorted boxing great Joe Louis to the ring.

He may be the oldest man in San Francisco, with 1906 earthquake survivor Herbert Hamrol, 104, coming in a close second. There are at least 10 centenarians at Laguna Honda Hospital. But the longevity award for a current San Francisco resident most likely goes to Chrissie Martenstein, who turned 110 in June. Martenstein was the guest of honor at the 100th anniversary of the 1906 earthquake.

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SAN FRANCISCO -

When Frank Mendez entered Laguna Honda Hospital 12 years ago, the hardest part was losing his dog Nannie. On his 105th birthday Monday, the wiry and tattooed man said he'd like nothing more than to have that long-lost friend sample some of his birthday cake.

Wearing a Hawaiian shirt and lei, Mendez celebrated with a dozen fellow patients and caretakers at the city-run nursing home. He said his years at Laguna Honda have been good to him.

"A nice place, nice people," he said. "The food, it's all right. I'd like more of it."

Mendez was born on Dec. 3, 1902, in the town of Hilo in what was then the territory of Hawaii. He grew up in Hong Kong and left China as a stowaway aboard a merchant marine ship. He said spent the majority of his life at sea, traveling around the world several times over. Caretakers at Laguna Honda said he still has the feistiness of a swarthy sailor.

"He's got a sharp tongue, he's irritable and he loves women," said Ellen Apolinario, who has served at the hospital as a registered nurse for more than 30 years. Perhaps that's why hospital staff posted a sign in the common room: "No hitting. No yelling. No