

Celebrating the legacy of John Cleveland and his home for girls

BY BOB VLACH
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Versailles resident Alice Mae Turner and her sister, Martha Rice, who lives in Elizabethtown, were among the 80 people attending "A Celebration of The John Cleveland Foundation: Serving Children for 140 Years."

The sisters attended the celebration to honor their mother — one of the earliest residents of The Cleveland Home.

Anabel Sutherland moved into the home for girls in 1902 after her father died and her mother could not earn enough income to keep the family together.

"She liked it very much once she got used to it," said Turner of her mother, who moved into the home at age 6. "But it was lonely for awhile." Anabel and sisters Alice and Dorothy, who also lived at The Cleveland Home, were able to spend weekends with their mom, a brother and sister.

Attending the reunion "brought back a lot of memories that my mother had there," said Turner, 81.

"It made us happy that she had a good place to live and to learn," she added.

Edna White, who moved into The Cleveland Home in 1938 as a 6-year-old and lived there until she was 18 years old, also attended the reunion, which was held at the Woodford Inn (formerly The Cleveland Home).

"This special reunion brought back the laughter and smiles as 'sisters' reunited and reconnected," wrote Don Fulford, executive director of Life Adventure Center of the Bluegrass in his newsletter.



ALICE MAE TURNER, right, and her sister, Martha Rice, attended "A Celebration of The John Cleveland Foundation: Serving Children for 140 Years" on May 16 at the Woodford Inn. The sisters attended the reunion in honor of their mother, who moved into the home when she was 6 years old. (Photo submitted)

"While miles now separate most of them, many realized that it wasn't Versailles or even the home that brought out their emotions, it was instead a connection of the heart and the power of their 'family' that joins them."

A decision to close The Cleveland Home residential facility at 140 Park Street and open what has become Life Adventure Center of the Bluegrass (LAC) came in 2005.

With more and more children being placed in foster care, Cleveland Home board members made the decision to move away from providing a home where young girls received treatment and instead go into preventative care to serve many more children living in Kentucky.

Today, Life Adventure Center of the Bluegrass offers a variety of one-day experiential education programs on its 575-acre farm at 570

Milner Road. LAC's challenge course, equine program and nature program are each designed to increase self-confidence, develop leadership and teamwork skills, as well as improve communication skills.

But the May 16 reunion "wasn't about Life Adventure Center and the programs that exist today," said Kelly Tyler, marketing coordinator for LAC. "It was about bringing the 'family' back together."

Former residents, staff members and board members reminisced about the past while glancing through photo albums offering visual reminders of life at The Cleveland Home. Those attending could also visit the room where they lived as a child.

"There were hugs, there were tears, there were stories being told in the corners of the Inn," said Tyler.